

**THE
MURDER
OF
DAVE
BRANDON**

A STORY OF THE
ROYAL NORTH-WEST
MOUNTED POLICE

T. LUND
AUTHOR OF
"WESTON"
"UP NORTH"

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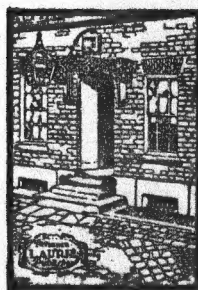
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A STORY OF THE ROYAL NORTH-
WEST MOUNTED POLICE

BY
T. LUND

AUTHOR OF
"WESTON OF THE ROYAL NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE,"
"UP NORTH"

LONDON
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THE MURDER OF DAVE BRANDON

CHAPTER I

BEN TURNER GETS THE SACK

THE windows of the long, squat, log bunk-house in the lumber-camp shone feebly yellow in the outside darkness, and threw luminous squares on the hard-trampled, littered snow on the ground around. From the log stable close by came the deep snorts of horses, and restless stamping of hoofs; and light streaming through occasional cracks in the building proved that the teamsters were busy looking after the material welfare of their charges.

From the lean-to cook-house, which abutted against one of the side-walls of the bunk-house, emanated the sound of rattling pans and the smell of cooking food. Inside the cook was shuffling peevishly and surlily about, muttering and growling profanely to himself, his language instantly coruscating at each imagined or real trivial mishap.

On the other side of the firmly closed door, leading into the bunk-house, the inmates were groping back to a new day of toil. The three oil-lamps swinging from the ceiling of the long, low room, with its tiers of bunks running along the walls, shed their light on thirty-odd faces, which all expressed, by frowns and scowls, that just now, at least,

life was a complete washout. Nobody spoke to any of his neighbours. The words that did trickle from their tobacco-stained lips from time to time were strictly general, and gave expression to popular sentiments in terms which would have reduced the most hardened revivalist to convulsions, and would have made him turn his eyes hopefully towards heaven for annihilating thunderbolts.

The members of the crew even carefully avoided looking at each other. The atmosphere was always at high tension at rousing-out times, and any careless glance might immediately form the basis for a fight; while an unguarded smile, even though it was intended to be encouraging, would in all probability cause a massacre.

The most touchy individual in the bunk-house was big, burly Ben Turner, who was sitting black and scowling on his bunk up in the front end of the room, cursing and snarling to himself. His mood, never sweet, was of the hair-trigger variety around the break of day. The most Homeric fight ever staged in that bunk-house had its source in such a trivial incident, that Turner's next-door bunk-mate had inadvertently stumbled over the former's feet while that gentleman was dressing. As Turner's adversary had lost two days' pay over that affair, owing to having been incapacitated for that length of time, the other inmates of the bunk-house stepped very warily since then when in the vicinity of Turner's bunk. As one man had summed up the situation: "Ben is jus' like one o' them burnin' sticks o' dynamite. If you jus' let it burn an' don't monkey with it, you're all right. But only touch it with the tip o' your finger, an' it goes sky-high; an' you with it."

Ben Turner was not popular. When men foregathered where he was not, he was unanimously voted a surly grouch and sorehead. And, besides, he was lazy, and fault-finding. Lately he had even begun to treat the orders of Dave Brandon, the foreman, with a certain amount of nonchalance. The crew all felt that Brandon

and Turner would have to "mix it" some day soon. There was even some speculation as to why that event had not taken place before now, and a few had whispered, as their opinion, that Brandon was scared of Turner; and in consequence their own estimation of Brandon had been considerably lowered.

Presently the door to the cook-house opened, and the cook's grumpy face appeared above a load of dishes he was carrying in his arms. He strode across to the long table, running nearly the whole length of the room, clattered the dishes down on the top, and then growled himself out again to fetch a new load, while movements in the bunk-house grew more animated.

The camp was situated in a clearing in the thick of the spruce-forest, some thirty miles to the north-west of the town of Prince Albert in the Province of Saskatchewan, which town led a somewhat somnolent and uneventful existence, while dreaming about the vanished days of its strength and importance.

All around the camp the tall, dark spruce-trees stretched into the cold, crisp air, towards the glittering stars overhead, in serene, aloof dignity, as if they wanted to stress the fact that whatever happened on the earth below was quite unworthy of their notice and interest. All in all, a quiet, picturesque idyll, which the slight undercurrent of the crew's morning grumpiness had not quite managed to wreck.

But suddenly the cook changed all that. By aid of a stick and a tin basin he announced by an infernal, ear-splitting tattoo, that his first duty of the day had now been well and truly discharged, and that the rest was up to the remainder of the crew. And they all responded nobly to his call to arms. The activities in the bunk-room grew more feverish and noisy, while lanterns soon came swinging hurriedly across from the stables.

The men were soon seated on the rough benches running along each side of the table; but though "Cookie's"

offerings gained their wholehearted approval, the fact seemed not to have had any sweetening influence on the morning pessimism of their dispositions. The meal progressed in comparative silence—as far as conversation was concerned, at least. But other sounds saw to it that the silence never grew oppressive while the crew were at table. The only remarks which passed their hard-working lips were all strictly limited to the business in hand, and consisted exclusively of growled requests, which on occasions developed into somewhat heated profanity if any request did not meet with the instant and immediate attention it merited.

At last, one by one, the men began to push back from the table. They filled and lighted their pipes, and gradually a more genial and friendly atmosphere began to pervade the room.

Presently Dave Brandon strolled across to the door and looked out. The stars were rapidly paling before the approaching dawn, and the tops of the spruces had begun to show their contours against the eastern sky.

"Time to get a hustle on, boys," he announced, turning back into the room. "Daylight is not far off."

The remark was not received with any marked enthusiasm; but the lumber-jacks got up, stretched and yawned prodigiously, and began to climb into their mackinaw coats, while they pulled their heavy, woollen hats well down over their ears. The cutters grabbed their axes, and frowned at them with distaste, while they tested the edge.

The only person who seemed cheered by the prospect of an immediate exodus was the cook.

"Dam' good thing to get all you bums out o' the way, so that a fellow can get a chance to clean up the mess after you," he growled ungraciously.

"What have you got to kick about, Cookie?" asked one of the crew. "You can stick to a warm, snug shack, while us fellows have to go traipsing around in the dam'

cold in the woods. I'll say you've got one helluva soft snap all right."

"Oh, is that so?" asked Cookie acidly. "A hell o' a soft snap, that is, standin' over a hot stove all day an' half the night, an' cookin' for a bunch o' bums, what's eatin' their fool heads off. I get so little sleep, I have about forgotten what sleep feels like. I'd like to see you tackle my job for one day. You'd soon have your belly full. Soft snap. Soft hell!" he ended with a snort.

"Well, cheer up, Cookie," smiled Dave Brandon. "When we break camp in the spring you can sleep night an' day for as long as you like."

"Oh, is that so? Well, that's all you know about it," answered Cookie pugnaciously. "Well, I won't say I won't have a rest for a week or two; but not for longer. 'Cause like a fool I have promised to cook for a farm south o' Prince Albert this comin' spring, summer, an' fall."

"Poor fellow," came a pitying voice from the crowd.

"Who said that?" snapped Cookie, bristling, glaring aggressively at the grinning crew.

"Dave Brandon," snickered another voice.

"You are a God dam' liar!" snapped Cookie.

"You're another!" came the prompt answer.

Cookie glared at the outfit, breathing heavily.

"Well, them that don't like my cookin' can go plumb to hell, an' rustle their own grub," he announced at last. "There's plenty o' wood an' good places for cookin'-fires all aroun'. I ain't forcin' nobody to eat my grub, so if you don't fancy it you can do the other thing. You all heard me chirp?" And having delivered himself of that heavy broadside he stamped off to the kitchen in high dudgeon, with a load of dishes in his arms.

One by one the men filed out of the door in the foreman's wake, feeling a little more cheerful. A mild baiting of the cook was one of their favourite relaxations; but, of course, it had to be carried out with a certain

amount of tact and discrimination, and within certain limits. If driven too far, Cookie might retaliate by lowering the standard of his culinary art. He might, for instance, serve "slush" instead of honest-to-goodness coffee—an appalling prospect to any self-respecting woodsman.

While the teamsters were hitching up their horses, the cutters stood leaning on their long-hafted axes, their breath rising in the icy air like puffs of steam from a locomotive when they opened their mouths to yawn or to pass some remark.

The first team was about to start on its creaking way into the forest when the foreman stepped up to the waiting group of cutters.

"Anybody seen Ben Turner?" he asked.

The men looked around.

"Nope. He ain't here. Guess, he ain't got out o' the bunk-house yet," remarked one.

Brandon's face hardened. He felt it was time for him to take a strong line with Mr. Turner. He had been too long-suffering as it was, and had pretended not to notice Turner's growing disregard for his authority. Not because he was afraid of Turner. Brandon had never felt the slightest hesitation in handling the toughest lumber-jack going, or he would not have held the position he did. No, his restraint was simply a mere matter of business. That season there was a shortage of lumber-hands in the district; and Brandon was short-handed as it was. He knew that Turner was not the sort of man who would take a disciplinary lesson sitting down; and that would mean that once they clashed Brandon would in all probability be forced to banish Turner from the camp for good, to avoid future friction and disturbances. And Brandon hated the prospect of losing another man when it was less than likely that he could pick up a substitute. But, on the other hand, he had noticed that several members of the crew had begun to look at him

a little askance because of his apparent leniency; and he decided that there was only one thing for him to do, if he did not want the control of the men to slip out of his hands.

With long, purposeful strides he walked across to the bunk-house door and threw it open, the crew watching him expectantly.

In front of one of the huge box-stoves, which heated the room, sat Mr. Ben Turner, smoking placidly, evidently quite at peace with the world.

"What's the matter with you?" called Brandon sharply. "Ain't you goin' to work to-day?"

Turner stretched himself and looked at his foreman with an insolent grin.

"Ain't no all-fired hurry, is there?" he asked lazily. "The teams ain't started yet."

"It's up to *me* to say whether there's hurry or no hurry," cut in Brandon. "An' you heard me tell you all to get a hustle on."

"Well, I didn't reckon it was so dam'd pressin' before the teams got started," remarked Turner with the same provoking grin. "So I thought I would just finish my smoke in ease an' comfort."

"Well, I'm tellin' you, it's pressin' now; so get a move on instanter, if you want a full day's pay!" snapped Brandon.

With maddening deliberation Turner got up from his seat, knocked his pipe carefully out against the stove, put it in his pocket, slowly donned his coat and hat, and finally he grabbed his axe and wandered nonchalantly towards the door.

Brandon watched him, seething with fury.

"Look here, you," he addressed Turner, as the latter emerged languidly from the bunk-house. "You don't seem to be quite sure in your own min', who's boss aroun' here. Let me just impress on you that anyone wantin' to stay on the pay-roll o' this outfit will have

to do what *I* tell him, an' do it dam' snappy at that. An' those who don't like it can take their time an' quit."

"Like hell you say," observed Turner with a sneer. "I didn't know this place was a kinder slave-joint where a fellow has to jump aroun' like a flea in a mitt every time he gets some fool order."

"I don't give a hoot what you think or what you don't think," retorted Brandon sharply. "But any man workin' for this outfit will take his orders from me, an' carry them out quickly, without no pow-pow. That's flat! Them's the rules o' this camp, an' them that won't abide by them rules will just simply an' naturally fly out!"

"Kinder high-handed, ain't yer?" asked Turner, his face tightening.

"I don't give one hoot in hell what you call it!" snapped Brandon. "But them rules stick, an' stick tight! So what's it goin' to be? Are you goin' to follow them rules, or are you goin' to clear out?"

"Since you are so hell-fired pressin'," growled Turner, "you can go right to hell, an' take your rules with you, you——!"

The finishing epithets of Turner's peroration were words which would act as a match to the explosive in any tense atmosphere amongst the carefree dwellers in the woods, and Brandon reacted promptly.

"Take off your coat!" he bellowed, his face white with passion. "No man is goin' to call me them names an' go off unscathed!"

The crew drifted nearer, a glow of agreeable excitement rising within them. At last IT had come! And each member of the crew, separately, gave great praise to Allah, because it had happened when he was present, and in a position to enjoy it all.

Cookie, who had heard the raised voices and felt that big events were imminent, appeared in the doorway of

the cook-house. He leaned up against the door-casing, arms akimbo; and from his point of vantage he watched the subsequent proceedings with grim approval. Any little thing which would break the monotony of the camp was a god-send was his silent comment.

It was a beautiful fight was the unanimous verdict of the audience after all was over. The two combatants were well matched. Turner had perhaps a shade the advantage in weight and strength, but these were offset by Brandon's greater nimbleness and a certain knowledge of the rudiments of technique, though somewhat crude and unfinished. But it served well in this kind of combat, where the main features were to hit hard, punish and hurt as much as possible, with an airy disregard for anything connected with the term "foul."

The *sop! sop!* of the punishing blows resounded in the clearing, while the heat from the bodies of the two hard-working gladiators rose around them like a light haze of mist in the cold air.

This way and that raged the battle, and often the absorbed and interested audience had to shift in a hurry to avoid being caught in the maelstrom of wildly swinging arms.

But gradually Turner began to weaken. He had never been a careful liver, but had always considered a day off as utterly wasted if he had not consumed all the booze he could hold, and some over. Consequently he soon began to experience troubles with his respiration, and his blows grew feebler and more erratic. Brandon, on the other hand, who had always believed in keeping on the safe side of the margin of booze, was still going full out, his lungs functioning normally, his fists working as regularly as pistons.

The audience, which wanted to prolong the gratifying display as long as possible, earnestly urged Turner to stand up and fight, but their pleadings were wasted. Brandon got in a few mighty blows in quick succession,

and one lucky one, which caught Turner squarely on the tip of his chin with plenty of brawn and muscle behind it, spelt the end of the fight. The ferocious scowl on Turner's face faded, and gave way to an expression of almost childish surprise, and he dropped to the ground, having lost all interest in the world for the time being.

The battered victor stood for a few minutes over his fallen antagonist, waiting to see if there was any fight left in the wreck, but he quickly decided that Turner was out for good.

He turned to the crowd, which was gazing at him with mixed admiration and congratulation.

"All right, you fellows," he growled. "Clear out o' here, an' get a hustle on. We have wasted too much time over this as it is. Bill an' Art, you two fellows carry Ben to his bunk; an' as soon as he is fit to travel, you, Bill, drive him to town in the cutter. I'm goin' to give Ben his time straight away. There ain't no room for grouches an' shirkers aroun' this outfit."

The men drifted away to their tasks, enthusiastically and animatedly discussing past events. They all felt well pleased and satisfied with the auspicious beginning of the day.

Cookie once more withdrew to his domain, closing the door firmly behind him. He was humming to himself with zest and good purpose, but with no music. He felt just then that life would be well worth living if an experience similar to the one just closed would brighten the dull humdrum of existence at least once daily; but, he finished his optimistic reflections, there was not a chance. Dave had so successfully and convincingly demonstrated his position as boss just now, that after this the crew would be as docile as lambs when he only lifted his finger. Hoh-hum! How commonplace life was after all, decided Cookie.

Half an hour later Dave Brandon entered the bunk-house with a sheaf of bills in his hand. He found

Turner endeavouring to remove the traces of battle, as far as they were removable, by the aid of a basin of water and a towel, which had presumably once been clean. Turner was totally ignoring Bill Langren, who was sitting watching the operation with keen interest, while handing out gratis, sound and well-meaning advice on the subject of first aid.

"Here's your pay, Turner," said the foreman. "You've got twenty days coming, less an advance o' twenty dollars. Here's forty dollars. Count 'em, an' see if they's right. An' as soon as you feel fit enough to travel, Bill will take you to town in the cutter."

Turner snapped the bills out of the foreman's hand and shoved them into his pocket without bothering about the formality of counting them.

"I'm ready to go as soon as Bill is," he growled, glaring at Brandon. "I ain't hankerin' after stayin' aroun' this — camp longer 'an I can help. But lemme tell you this, Brandon, this thing ain't finished yet! You won this time, but there is a time after this. An' I'll git you yet, Brandon, even if it's the last thing I do!"

"Well, you might; an' then again, you mightn't. Howsomever, I ain't goin' to lose no sleep over that," observed the foreman philosophically. "Say, Bill," he addressed Langren, who held the job as under-foreman of the camp. "Seein' Turner is ready to travel, you've better get hitched up straight away, an' pull out. I have told Cookie to fix you up a grub-box. The trail ought to be good, so you should make town easily in the afternoon some time. An' while you are in town, you might look aroun' an' see if you can't scare up a couple o' fellows. We are gettin' mighty short-handed. Though I guess there won't be much o' a chance this time o' the season."

"Right you are, Dave. I'll see what I can do," replied Langren, getting up from his seat and going off to make his preparations for the trip.

Turner once more applied himself to the basin, while Brandon left the bunk-house and strode into the woods to join the crew.

And about one hour later the surly, disgusted Turner had left behind him the camp, with its stinging reminder of his confusion.

CHAPTER II

COOKIE GETS A SHOCK

AFTER Ben Turner's exit life once more moved smoothly at Dave Brandon's camp for a few days. Bill Langren returned in due course, but he had been unable to pick up any new additions to the crew. Langren reported that Turner had sent the message back that he was going to fix Dave Brandon; which merely caused Dave to shrug his shoulders.

Then one night Charley Crow, a Cree Indian, who had somehow drifted into the crew as a teamster, came to the foreman and complained that he was sick, and wanted to quit.

"What the hell has got into you?" asked the disgusted Brandon, glaring at Charley. "You look much the same as usual to me. Anyhow, you don't seem to be off your feed as far's I can see."

"Me feel ver' bad. Me want quit at once. So!" persisted Charley.

"Can't you wait till pay-day, anyhow? It's only a week off. I ain't got enough cash to pay you off just now," urged Brandon.

"You give me paper, an' I go get money at office in Prince Albert," suggested Charley. "Me not want to stay longer when me sick."

"Hell o' a note!" snorted Dave. "Here am I short-handed, an' then you go along an' quit, just be'dause you

have got a flee-itch or somethin'. If you had been anywhere near a man, you would have shown some guts an' stuck to your job, sick or not sick."

But Dave's unflattering insinuations were completely wasted on Charley.

"Me want t' leave to-morrow mornin'," he persisted.

Dave pondered. Charley was not one of his best men; far from it. He would not have been in the crew at all if there had not been such a shortage of woodsmen in the fall. And, besides, Charley was rather unpopular with the rest of the crew. The average woodsman always looks with deep distrust at an Indian, whom they consider shifty and untrustworthy as a general rule. But apart from racial consideration, the crew had found Charley to be of a brooding and surly disposition. He was very silent, and kept almost exclusively to himself. So the rest of the crew had not much use for him, and they did not take the trouble to disguise the fact. And this did not tend to brighten the atmosphere in the bunk-house, which was often in need of some enlivening influence. So, having taken everything into consideration, Dave Brandon came to the conclusion that Charley would not be so much of a loss after all.

"All right," he said at last. "I'll give you your time. Hey, Bill!" he hailed his right-hand man. "Charley is goin' to quit. You have better go to town with him in the mornin' an' try to pick up some new men. Stay a few days if you think that will be any good."

"Dam' quitter!" growled one of the crew, expectorating his disgust at the hot stove, which sizzled in sympathy.

"That ain't nothin' new," volunteered another. "All Injuns is white-livered skunks what ain't got the guts to stick to honest work. If they can't steal, they beg."

For a fraction of a moment a light sprang up in Charley's eyes at the taunts; but the next second his face was once more the usual stoical, apparently unmovable, mask. And further insulting remarks from the inventive

and imaginative section of the crew he completely ignored.

On the following morning, he left the camp with Langren, without leaving behind him any sense of loss.

Three days later Bill Langren returned exultantly with three new men. They were Scandinavians, who had just arrived from overseas, and who had drifted up to Prince Albert in search of work. Their knowledge of English was very rudimental, but they looked strong and husky. And as Langren sagely observed to Dave:

"They ain't hired to make speeches, but to fell trees, an' drive teams, an' suchlike, so I guess they's quite hocus-pocus."

Dave Brandon agreed with him; and after he had watched the new recruits at work, he rejoiced. They were certainly good, willing and steady workers, and they knew all there was to know about lumber-work. And so Dave gave great praise to his good luck for ridding him of Turner and Charley, and sending him such able and superior substitutes.

On the last day of the month Dave drove in to Prince Albert to draw the pay-roll from the head office of the lumber-firm he was working for. The men invariably got paid in cash. The average woodsman scorns cheques. He prefers the agreeable feel of real money in his pockets to a mere piece of paper with some figures and a promise on the face of it. Who knows what might happen before he would have a chance to convert that slip of paper into cool cash? The firm might go broke, for instance, and where would he be then? And besides, cash is an indispensable adjunct to his much treasured poker games. IOU's are severely barred on the same principles as those pertaining to cheques. Lumbering is not a wholly safe occupation, and if an accident should happen to the debtor, who was then going to take up the IOU? So there are plenty of weighty reasons why coin of the realm should be the motto.

In the afternoon of the day following the foreman's departure for town, Cookie was sitting by the frost-covered window in the cook-shack enjoying a quiet smoke. It would be almost an hour yet before he had to throw himself energetically into the task of preparing the evening meal for the crew, and so it was essential to make as much as possible of this interval of peace and rest. On the hot stove the coffee-pot proclaimed that it was on strict duty by sending its tempting aroma into the air. Cookie knew that Dave Brandon might be back any time now, and he further knew to a nicety exactly what the inner man clamoured for after the outer man had been exposed to a temperature of some forty below zero in an open cutter for more than six hours, even when well wrapped up in furs.

Suddenly Cookie jumped up and stared out of the window, an expression of keen surprise on his face. He thought he had heard the faint drumming of a distant galloping horse; a circumstance which was certainly tending to evoke curiosity around that camp.

"Holy jumpin' Jehoshaphat!" exclaimed Cookie suddenly. He hurriedly removed his pipe, and pressed his face tightly against the window-pane to get the full benefit of a small, clear space in the covering of ice and frost which clung tenaciously to the glass in spite of the heat in the shack. "What the——"

He did not finish his sentence, but made for the door. He had seen a loose horse coming tearing wildly into the clearing, galloping straight for the stable.

In front of the stable door Cookie found standing a chestnut horse, covered with foam and lather. Its sides were heaving, its head was drooping miserably, and it was trembling all over as if terrified. The head-stall and bit were in place, and to its neck and back were still attached some pieces of broken harness.

"Christ!" whispered Cookie. "That's one o' Dave's horses. I wonder what's happened."

But he quickly abandoned fruitless speculations, and hurriedly began attending to the needs of the moment.

He opened the stable and led the horse to its stall, removed the bridle and remnants of harness, rubbed the horse briskly down with some whisks of straw, covered it up with two horse-blankets, and finally spread some hay in front of it. He did not dare water it before it had cooled down a little.

Then Cookie sprinted back to the cook-shack, quickly donned a mackinaw coat, without giving himself time to remove his greasy apron, put on a woollen hat and a pair of fur gauntlets, and returned in double time to the stable.

He put the bridle on one of the spare horses standing there, led it outside the stable, jumped on its bare back, and rode as fast as the heavy dray would go into the woods along the trail leading to the place where the crew was working.

Cookie created quite a stir among those of the crew who noticed his advent; and grins sprang up on their faces at the extremely ludicrous spectacle of the rather diminutive Cookie, with the short mackinaw coat over his streaming apron, on the big, clumsily galloping dray. But as soon as they got a closer view of Cookie's face their grins died an instantaneous death.

"What's up, Cookie?" called someone.

"Where's Bill Langren?" shouted Cookie. "Get Bill at once!"

"Here I am!" called Langren, coming on the run. "What the hell's the matter?"

"Dave's chestnut just came tearin' into camp with its harness all torn to hell! It looked scared to death, an' as if it had been comin' hell-for-leather. Somethin' is sure to have happened to Dave."

"What!" yelled Langren, staring stupidly at Cookie for a second or two. But then, with a snap, he stirred into action. "Hey, Joe!" he shouted to Joe Hawkins,

who was standing beside an empty sleigh. "Come along an' drive me back to camp as fast as them saw-horses o' yourn can go. The rest o' you fellows just go on with the work. Joe an' I'll look into this."

The little cavalcade, with Cookie bringing up the rear, made good time, considering that Joe's team had almost a whole day of hard work behind them. As soon as they arrived at the camp Langren briskly shouted his orders.

"Joe! Go ahead an' hitch up that spare team to the flat-sleigh. Cookie! Pack a box of grub. I'll rustle some lanterns. It will probably be dark before we get to Dave!"

Each man did his allotted share quickly and efficiently, and soon the team stood ready to depart. Langren was about to jump into the sleigh when he paused.

"Wait a secon', Joe!" he called, and ran back to the bunk-house. In a few moments he returned with his rifle, cramming cartridges into the magazine as he was running towards the sleigh.

"Better tote this along. You never know in a case like this," he remarked a little apologetically to Joe and Cookie, who were regarding the lethal weapon with mild curiosity; but they both nodded their agreement.

And the next moment the team was lumbering down the trail towards Prince Albert, as rapidly as shouts and cracking whip could urge them.

As daylight was merging into dusk the crew returned to camp. When they heard that Langren and Hawkins had as yet not returned, an atmosphere of wild speculation and surmise arose.

During supper conversation flourished with an unprecedented extravagance. Several reasons were postulated to account for the return of the horse. The most popular one was that the team had run away; that the cutter had crashed up against some tree along the trail, and that the chestnut had broken loose and had continued its mad

career back to camp. But when it was pointed out that in that case Dave would certainly have continued his trip with the remaining horse, and would have been back in camp by now, the further theory was advanced that Dave might have been knocked unconscious when the sleigh crashed, and was, perhaps, lying injured and helpless somewhere on the trail.

All these theories were referred to Cookie, who was leaning up against the wall near the doorway into the kitchen with legs crossed and arms akimbo—a favourite position of his—looking somewhat like a prophet officiating at a meeting of the laity. It was universally felt that Cookie, as the original discoverer of the first indications of mystery, ought to possess special qualifications for passing a verdict.

The hours dragged on, but there were no indications that any one of the crew was ready to retire for the night in spite of the fatiguing toil of the day. Their excitement was too keen and vivid for that. Even the usual poker games seemed to lack their habitual aspect of absorbed interest.

Occasionally one of the men would walk outside and listen intently for sounds down the trail, but they returned from each trip barren of news.

At last, shortly before midnight, a scout came hurrying in and reported that he thought he could hear the distant creak of a sleigh.

Immediately the crew armed themselves with the lanterns available and streamed out the door. They could all distinctly hear the creaking from the approaching sleigh, and they strained their eyes, trying to look down the dark trail. At last they saw a vague, moving shadow come towards them, and soon the team swung into camp. As soon as it stopped within the radiance of the light thrown by the lanterns a chill premonition of tragedy swept over the waiting crowd. On the front end of the sleigh were perched Langren and Joe Hawkins, looking

unusually grave; on the sleigh itself they could see a bulk covered up with horse-blankets; while trailing behind, tied to the back of the sleigh, was Dave Brandon's cutter.

"What—what has happened?" asked one, his voice a little husky.

"Dave's dead," came Langren's grave answer. "He has been murdered, boys. Shot through the head. An' the pay-roll is gone. That's Dave's body behin' on the sleigh."

Deep, muttered, profane growls rose from the crowd.

"We foun' his cutter about ten miles down the trail," continued Langren. "A heavy spruce had been dropped acrost the road, just roun' a bend. We foun' the other horse tangled up in the spruce with a broken leg, an' half dead. We put it out o' its agony instanter. An' beside the sleigh we foun' Dave's body in a pool o' blood. He had a bullet-hole through his head. An' we foun' something more when we started looking aroun' with our lanterns. We foun' snow-shoe tracks comin' out o' the woods to the trail, an' goin' back in. An' we also foun' the place where the murderin' skunk had been waitin' behin' a spruce, not more than ten feet from the trail. I guess he shot Dave down as soon as the team pulled up before the spruce that was blockin' the road."

"Did you follow the tracks?" asked someone.

"No use," answered Langren. "The skunk would be miles away by the time we got there. An' besides, we hadn't any snow-shoes. His tracks seemed to lead about north-west. Perhaps he has cut across from the Lac la Ronge trail up that way."

The crew was hushed and silent for a while, the grim disaster having wholly subdued them for the moment. But suddenly a man gave voice to an idea which had just come to him.

"Bet Ben Turner did it!" he exclaimed excitedly. "You all heard him tell Dave he would fix him, an' that

was also the last thing he tol' Langren before they parted in town. I bet this is his idea o' gettin' even."

The crowd at once took up the suggestion. It gave them some corporeal object on which to vent their bubbling rage. Fierce imprecations and curses merged into a babel of angry sounds, and blood-curdling suggestions, richly embroidered with profanity, were freely offered for the ultimate disposal of Ben Turner.

"Shut up with all that!" cut Langren's voice through the uproar. "We don't know if Ben has had a han' in this business yet. No use shoutin' what you'll all do to him for a thing you don't know if he's done. Some totally different fellow may have done it. Now, I'm goin' to take Dave's body to town in the mornin', an' I'm goin' to get the Mounties on to this job instanter. An' they'll soon fin' out the rights o' it, I reckon. Now, some o' you give me a han' here. We'll leave Dave in the tool-shed till the mornin'."

The crowd recognized the justice of Langren's sage remarks, and the vituperations against Turner soon died down. But, nevertheless, they all felt firmly convinced that the circumstances surrounding Dave Brandon's death were far from being any mystery. On the other hand, it might perhaps be just as well to give the police a chance of showing what they were able to do.

Reverential hands lifted the bundle which had once been Dave Brandon from the sleigh. They carried it across to the tool-shed, where it was laid out for the night on a pile of sacking.

The men then returned to the bunk-house, but in spite of the stirring events of the day, the tragic climax and the various questions in that connection which asked for discussion, it did not take very long before the inmates began to hunt their bunks. And soon they were all sleeping the deep sleep of wearied and exhausted bodies.

CHAPTER III

INVESTIGATIONS

THE news of the murder of Dave Brandon created a mild stir up in that grey stone pile which constituted the Headquarters of "F" Division, Royal North-West Mounted Police, and which squatted well up on the hill which forms the eastern rampart of the town of Prince Albert. But the account of the brutal, cold-blooded murder was not met with quite the horror and aversion to which it was undoubtedly entitled. Most of the inmates of that grey stone building had more than a nodding acquaintance with horror and tragedy, so they were able to contemplate a fresh outrage with an equanimity which appeared callous, and almost indecent, to the uninitiated. None of them had known Dave Brandon personally, so his tragic end was to them merely an impersonal "case." Among the rank and file there was even a quiet, though decently concealed, satisfaction that this case had turned up, because times around the Division had lately been so very slack that quite a few members had seriously begun to wonder why on earth the Government paid them.

Bill Langren's story was listened to with keen, businesslike attention, and when he had finished he was treated to a few sympathetic remarks, appropriate to the occasion.

On being asked if he suspected any person or persons, he hesitatingly gave a brief account of the fracas between

Brandon and Turner; the latter's subsequent threats against Brandon, and the crew's interpretation of events.

When finally Bill Langren had told all he had to tell which had any bearing on the tragedy, Corporal Connor and Constable Douglas were detailed to proceed back with Langren and carry on investigations at and around the scene of the outrage. In the meantime an efficient and sensitive machinery was set in motion by Headquarters to find out all there was to find out about Ben Turner; especially as to present whereabouts.

Langren had arrived in Prince Albert with his sad freight early in the afternoon, and before he had attended to all matters connected with his mission, the afternoon was so far advanced that the return trip had to be postponed till the following morning.

Bright and early the next day Langren's team plodded along the silent forest trail, the frozen snow creaking sharply under the runners of the sleigh. Behind followed Corporal Connor and Constable Douglas driving a dog-train. Their sleigh was well loaded with provisions and outfit. They were prepared to follow the murderer's trail as far as it could be followed, and they had equipped themselves accordingly.

They had a short rest around noon, when they enjoyed a bite of lunch with keen appetites in front of a roaring fire.

A few miles farther up the trail they arrived on the scene of the outrage. There was plenty of evidence of the recent tragedy. Close beside the trail lay the carcass of the dead horse and the spruce-tree which had been used to block the trail. Langren and Hawkins had dragged them there on their first visit to the scene in order to clear the road. On the trail itself was an ominous, ugly red patch on the white snow, where Brandon's head had rested.

Langren explained to the two policemen in what position he had found the spruce-tree, the sleigh, the injured

horse, and Brandon's body, and further drew their attention to the snow-shoe tracks.

Connor and Douglas at once fell to work, trying to pick up what information they could, but results were meagre. It was easy enough to reconstruct the crime itself, the tracks told that tale quite plainly. They could even see how the assassin had been tramping up and down behind his cover to keep warm, while waiting for his victim. But they found absolutely nothing which could remotely serve as a clue to the identity of the murderer.

"I thought they had been two at first," volunteered Langren. "You see, there is that track comin' along the trail from farther down, an' then there's two tracks leadin' into the woods from here, an' another comin' out: But if you look at them tracks close, you'll notice that there is a funny knot on the babiche near the toe-en' o' the left snow-shoe, an' that knot shows up plain in all them tracks. So it's a dead cinch, they've all been made by the same fellow."

Connor nodded.

"Looks that way right enough," he agreed. "I suppose he struck the camp-trail farther down, and then walked along it to find a suitable place for his ambush. But one thing is certain, after he had shot Brandon he went straight into the woods from here, and made his escape that way. So I move that we follow those tracks. It is of greater interest to us to know where that fellow has gone to than where he came from. If they fizzle out, we'll return and have a go at that other trail of his. So come on, Douglas, my lad. Let's hurry up and finish our job around here, and then we'll try to find out where our unknown friend has headed for."

About half an hour later they took leave of Langren, and turned their dog-team into the forest along the snow-shoe tracks. Langren followed them with wistful and envious eyes, till the forest had swallowed them up

completely. He would have given a lot to have been in on that chase, but as the wish was utterly futile, he turned away with a sigh, and started his horses towards camp.

Connor and Douglas steadily followed the trail left by the murderer. They took turn and turn about breaking trail in the deep snow for their dogs. The one off duty walked behind the sleigh in comparative comfort, favouring his hard-working comrade in front with sarcastic and malicious encouragement.

After having travelled this way for about a couple of miles they emerged into a small clearing, where the blackened site of a fire with the usual spruce-mat alongside gave evidence of a recent camp.

"His camp," grunted Connor, who was just then serving his trick at trail-breaking, turning around to Douglas.

"Sure thing," agreed Douglas. "I suppose he has been hanging out around here, and has been walking backwards and forwards to the camp road, looking out for Brandon."

"With only two sets of tracks leading from the trail down there to this camp, and only one leading down to it from here?" asked Connor a little patronizingly. "Not jolly likely. Leave me in peace for a few minutes, comrade. I feel the great brain is about to overflow and make itself proud."

"'Atta boy!" grinned Douglas. "And be sure to write down all your sage and deep deductions so they won't be lost to posterity."

But Connor gave no heed to his companion's frivolous chaff. He was concentrating.

"Now listen," he said after a while. "This is how I read this little problem. Our friend must have been pretty well up in Brandon's routine. You remember, Langren told us up at the Barracks that Brandon had always made a rule of going in for the pay-roll on the

last day of each month, returning to camp on the following day. The murderer has evidently known about this, and has based his movements on the knowledge. So we——”

“Hey! Hold on a minute, Sherlock,” interrupted Douglas rudely. “Seems to me you are taking too much for granted. I know something about lumber-camps myself, and as far as I know, *all* the camps around here send in for their pay-roll on the last day of the month. So any fool who had ever been near a lumber-camp would know about that part of Brandon’s routine, even if he had never been near Brandon’s camp.”

“Oh, shut up! You have not the soul of a true detective,” snorted Connor scathingly. “You lack the necessary flight of fancy, as it were. Anyhow, I bet Mr. Man first sneaked up to the trail and made sure that Brandon kept to schedule. Having seen him pass on his way to town, Mr. Man probably picked out a place for his ambush. After he had finished his scouting he retired up here, where a fire couldn’t be spotted from the trail, so he wouldn’t risk any inconvenient and curious-minded visitors. Then he spent the night here, hence the spruce-mat. Before the expected return of Brandon, I suppose he sneaked back down the trail, felled that tree across the road, and then walked up and down in his cover to keep his little footsies warm while waiting. Then he shot Brandon when the horses stopped before the tree, pinched the pay-roll and buzzed off. What do you think of that for a bit of first-class sleuth-stuff. Pretty neat, what?”

“Dashed smart and bright, I call it,” exclaimed Douglas in false congratulation. “Fancy that brain of yours being able to figure out all that on its lonesome without straining itself past repairs. After this, everything is quite clear to me. Brandon was shot through the head by some fellow, the pay-roll was pinched, and the naughty bloke who did it all spent the night here. You

know, before you put me right, I was half inclined to think that Brandon shot himself, and then legged it with the lucre afterwards. You forgot to mention a few things though which ought to be useful, such as: age, sex, name, disposition, peculiarities, if any, and last, but not least, the present whereabouts of yon interesting warrior," ended Douglas with an impudent smile.

"Oh, go to hell!" invited his grinning companion. "At least it looks pretty black for that Turner fellow, provided it can be proved that he was anywhere in this neighbourhood around the time of the murder."

"You don't say!" jabbed Douglas. "Do you really mean to tell me that your brain has had to work overtime just to grasp that profound and interesting fact? Even I, who don't profess to be in your class when it comes to brains, got a stranglehold on that circumstance as soon as Langren had told his story up at the Barracks. But let's buzz along before that fertile brain of yours makes a complete ass of itself."

"Quite," agreed Connor sweetly. "And it is *your* turn to break trail. So off you go."

The jeering grin on Douglas's face died an instantaneous death at the words, and growling something in his throat he walked past Connor, who was beaming paternally on him, and started on his plodding course.

A few miles farther along they came across a set of snow-shoe tracks which branched off from the trail they were following. These new tracks pointed towards the south-west, on a course about parallel to the one they had come. Connor walked over and studied them closely for some minutes.

"Here are our friend's tracks going down to the camp-road," he announced. "I can spot the same funny knot in the left snow-shoe that we noticed in the tracks down there. Well, that saves us the trouble of going back to back-track the fellow."

"Thank the Lord for small mercies," muttered

Douglas piously. "That saves us any amount of trail-breaking. And if there is one thing on this earth that ages a man before his time and fills him with misanthropy and pessimism, it is breaking trail for sleigh-dogs," he confessed with convincing candour. "Dashed nice and considerate of our unknown pal to simplify matters for us."

"Well, I wouldn't bank too much on that simplifying part," grunted Connor sceptically. "Something has persistently whispered to me that we shall shortly finish up on the main Prince Albert-Lac la Ronge trail, and once on that hard trail, it means good-bye to tracks. We'll be hopelessly snookered, my lad."

And Connor's words proved prophetic. An hour later they were standing on the hard-packed snow on the well trafficked trail between Prince Albert and Lac la Ronge.

"Dam' it!" did Connor voice his disgust. "This about dishes us. Obviously the fellow has taken off his snow-shoes here, and after, he has skinned either up or down the trail. And as far as we are concerned he couldn't have given us the slip more completely if he had taken unto himself wings and had flitted gaily away. No moccasin tracks will show on this darn hard trail, even if we knew what our friend's moccasin tracks looked like, which we don't, blast it! Now, I'm damned certain in my own mind that our friend did not return to P.A., but has gone up north somewhere. If he had intended to return to town he would have struck across to the camp-trail farther south. So if it had been left to me, I should have gone up the trail to find if anybody answering to Turner's description has been seen up that way lately. But you know, our hands are tied. That blasted Woof"—the popular nickname for Inspector Brewster—"gave me strict instructions before we pulled out to return at once to Headquarters if we didn't find a plain trail to follow. And not by any stretch of imagination could this trail be called plain, blast it! If it had been

anybody but Woof, I should have taken a chance, but you know that gentleman loves us just as much as we love him, and is always looking for pegs to hang something on. So as it is . . . Oh, hell!" And Connor broke off his elegy and stared moodily ahead of him.

Douglas said nothing. He felt Connor had ably said what there was to say. He had seated himself on the sleigh, and awaited further events with patience.

At last Connor stirred out of his reverie.

"Oh, well. Let's find some place to camp. Nothing more we can do," he remarked disconsolately.

Douglas got up and started the sleigh, Connor looking lugubriously on.

"Hey! Hold on a minute!" he cried suddenly.

"Whoa!" shouted Douglas to the dogs. Then he turned to Connor. "What's the matter now? Your brain getting rampant again?" he asked suspiciously.

"I just thought of something," said Connor, his face once more animated. "Would a fellow be tramping around up here on snow-shoes with a pack on his back? Not likely. He would make himself too conspicuous. It would arouse curiosity and comment; would be a dead give-away. On the other hand, a fellow driving a dog-team would pass unnoticed. So I bet our fellow had a team of dogs cached somewhere along this trail."

"Something in that," observed Douglas. "But this fellow may have cut into the woods and avoided the trails."

"Perhaps. But then we may be able to pick up his trail at the point where he cut into the woods. Let's try it, anyhow. We still have about a couple of hours of daylight left. We'll push along up the trail till dark, and see if we can discover anything. If we don't come across any traces of Mr. Man up there, we'll try south of here to-morrow, on our trip back to town."

"Righto," agreed Douglas. "You watch the right side of the trail, and I'll take the left."

About three miles up the trail Connor suddenly stopped the dogs with a loud: "Whoa!"

"Look at this, Douglas," he called triumphantly. "Here's a sleigh-track leading into the woods, or rather coming out," he amended, after having bent down and examined the track.

"Well, what about it?" asked Douglas, unimpressed. "May be some trapper's trail."

"There are no trapping camps around here," stated Connor. "I feel in my bones that this trail has some connection with the dear absent. Let's go along, at least, and see where it leads to."

"Just as you say. Anything to make you happy," observed Douglas patronizingly.

The trail stopped dead in a small clearing by a frozen creek, a couple of miles ahead, and the usual signs proclaimed that somebody had been recently camping here.

"Hold on a mo., Douglas," warned Connor. "Stay where you are with the dogs, while I go ahead and do a bit of sleuth stuff."

"Shoot ahead, Sherlock. Suits me right, taking it easy on the sleigh."

Quickly and systematically Connor searched the clearing. The years he had spent up around Portage Bend as a constable had given him quite a lot of experience in wood-lore and the art of reading signs. He passed up nothing, and quickly drew his conclusions.

"One man and five dogs," he informed Douglas after he had finished his investigations. "And they have been camping here for some days. At least, the dogs have been chained up here for more than one day, judging by what they have left behind them around the trees they have been tied to. And what is more important, there has been a cache up in that tree yonder. That shows the fellow has been away from here for some time. No man caches his outfit when he intends hanging around camp."

"Perhaps he was a moose-hunter or something, and has gone into the woods from here," suggested Douglas.

"You lose. There are no tracks leading into the woods from here, so if that fellow has been away from his camp at all, he must have gone back to the main trail over his own tracks. And that cache says he has been away. So, personally, I think this is the camp of our homicidal friend, and that he parked his dogs here when he went down to do the dirty on Brandon. It hangs together, anyhow."

"H'm!" grunted Douglas sceptically. "Any snowshoe tracks around?"

"Unfortunately not. Or else we could have settled the question at once, whether the fellow who camped here was our man or not. But even so, I feel dead certain that this was the camp of our missing pal."

"Well, provided you are right, what do we do now, sergeant-major?" asked Douglas irreverently. "Your theory sounds plausible and interesting, but where is the practical value? I mean, even if this has actually been the camp of our missing friend, we are not any better off than we were before. All we know is that the fellow has possibly camped here, and that he has obviously pushed back to the Lac la Ronge trail, but further than that we have no pointer as to direction taken, destination, or identity of the bloke."

"Oh, I don't know," observed Connor. "Seems to me we're getting somewhere, slow but sure. Chances are that Mr. Ben Turner is identical with our elusive friend, and now we have got additional strong evidence that the murderer is driving a team of five dogs. So if we can prove that Turner has been driving around with five dogs up this way recently, we have a pretty strong case against him."

"Always provided that your theory with regard to this camp is correct," remarked Douglas.

"And why shouldn't it be right?" demanded Connor

somewhat aggressively. "What other sound, sane reason is there for anybody to be camping in here?"

"Why ask me? How the dickens should *I* know?" asked Douglas indignantly. "Perhaps the fellow was merely having a picnic."

"Don't try to be a funny ass," reproved Connor. "You know just as well as I do that people don't go picnicking up in this country. I feel absolutely positive that I'm right. But let's clear out of here. We'll push back to the main trail, and find some decent spot to camp. We want to be near the trail, so we can stop anybody passing and question them. Perhaps somebody can give us a tip. But I'm afraid our luck is out for the present," he ended with a sigh. "So I fear we shall have to return to P.A. to-morrow morning."

They soon found a small clearing just off the trail which suited their requirements, and they lost no time in building up a camp-fire, which satisfied their somewhat exacting ideas as to what a good camp-fire should be.

In his more genial and expansive moments Corporal Connor had often been heard to observe that there were few things in this world that could beat the agreeable sensation of sitting roasting in front of a roaring blaze after a satisfying supper, at the end of a day's trek in the severe cold of the Canadian winter, when the flickering flames throw a ruddy circle of light into the dark night, and the stars glitter overhead. He could at times wax quite poetical over the subject, though usually quite a normal and unemotional young man.

But to-night the camp-fire seemed to have lost its usual power to charm. The prospect of returning to Prince Albert on the morrow had for the time soured Connor's outlook on life, and had filled him with a certain measure of misanthropy.

He unceasingly enriched Constable Douglas's ears by accounts of what the further procedure in their quest ought to be, if initiative and the inventiveness of genius

had not been smothered in advance by wholly fatuous and idiotic orders. He grew quite eloquent, and propounded one brilliant scheme after the other. The one outstanding feature common to all was that further investigations ought to be carried out in a direction diametrically opposed to the geographical position of Prince Albert.

"And just to think that a fellow like that dashed Woof, an ex-dishwasher or something, who has sneaked into an inspectorship through a back door opened to him by political chums, a fellow who knows nothing about police-work, or the country, or the people, shall be in a position to dictate to us fellows, who know all there is to know about things," he explained bitterly and modestly at the end of one lengthy dissertation. "It's enough to give a fellow a severe pain! 'Return at once for further orders if you don't find a plain trail to follow!'" he mimicked savagely. "Oh, hell!"

"Oh, I don't see so much to kick about," observed Douglas. "P.A. isn't such a dusty old town after all. At least, there's more to occupy a fellow in there than mushing around up here without any definite aim. Personally, I find it a bit monotonous."

"Oh, quite. I suppose you like Woof's winning ways," sneered Connor. "I shouldn't be surprised to hear you say that you'd feel lonesome without his sweet face constantly before you, and that you would miss being chased around by him like a blasted dog."

"I'm not wildly enthusiastic over our one and only Woof, I'll admit," answered Douglas philosophically. "But I don't see him all the time."

"I should think you see more than enough of him," snorted Connor, who refused to have his grievances minimized in any way. "And besides Woof, there are rifle-drill, stables, and a dozen other fatuous things which have been invented to blast the existence of a long-suffering fellow. But I suppose you love all that."

"Not so you could notice it. But there is plenty of spare time over, and the movies have been quite corking lately. Besides, I know quite a few decent, good-looking kids in town," confessed Douglas with an unabashed grin.

"Movies and girls. That's all you kids think about," snorted Connor with the lofty contempt of superior twenty-eight for budding adolescence.

"Have a heart, grandpa," grinned Douglas. "Remember, you were young yourself once."

"When I was your age, I had plenty of other things to occupy me than movies and girls," stated Connor with vast dignity. "And just to think that I have to go back to all that rot in P.A. instead of . . ." And he forthwith burst into another long and earnest eulogy of the free and easy life in the woods, far removed from the hampering bonds of meddling superiors and irksome routine.

So deeply rooted was his grievance that even after they had rolled into their bedding for the night he almost drove Douglas to distraction by breaking in on his first sleep just to make him a present of a few profound truths that had just occurred to him. But Douglas rose to the occasion, and frankly said exactly those things which he felt the situation demanded. After that Douglas was granted the peace and quietness for which he craved.

While they were at breakfast on the following morning, Connor suddenly cocked an ear up the trail.

"Sounds like dog-bells," he muttered.

"Yes. Sounds like it," agreed Douglas, after having listened for a few moments. "Some fellow who likes early rising, evidently."

"With a bit of luck he may have met Turner," exclaimed Connor, his optimism in full blast at once. "If he has, then we have our 'plain trail,' and we'll just stick to that trail like billy-ho. Perhaps we shall still manage to side-track Woof."

Douglas did not look wildly enthusiastic at the prospect.

Probably the pull of Prince Albert, with its many lures, was too strong for him.

Steadily the tinkle of the small bells on the dog-harness grew plainer, and soon six fine huskies hove in sight, trotting briskly ahead before a well-loaded sleigh.

At a hail from Connor the sleigh stopped when it came abreast of the camp, and the driver joined them. He was a white trapper on his way to Prince Albert with a load of furs.

"Good morning. Had grub yet?" greeted Connor. "If not, have some with us."

"Thanks. I had my grub before daylight," said the trapper with a smile. "I want to get in early, so I made an early start. I camped a few miles up the trail last night."

"Say, do you happen to know a lumber-jack by the name of Ben Turner?" asked Connor.

"Nope. Not that I know o'. What's he gone an' done?"

"I don't know yet. We just want to have a pow-wow with him," was Connor's guarded answer. Then he went on to describe Turner, and asked the trapper if he had met anybody answering to that description, who was driving a team of five dogs, anywhere on the trail.

"Nope," answered the trapper positively. "The only white man I met was one of the Hudson's Bay boys goin' up to Lac la Ronge. That was yesterday mornin'. And besides him I only met a coupla Injuns."

"Who were the Indians?" asked Connor, who thought it highly advisable to gather all the information he could about all persons who had been going up the trail during the last few days.

"Search me," answered the trapper. "I didn't know any o' them. An' one Injun looks much the same as any other to me, when they's all wrapped up in caribou-coats."

"Oh, well," sighed Connor, seeing his last hope shattered. "I suppose he isn't up that way then. Well,

seeing you are in a hurry, we won't keep you. So long, and good luck."

"So long." And the trapper walked across to his team, and started it down the trail with an encouraging "Mush! "

And half an hour later Connor and Douglas had finished their meal, had repacked their sleigh, and had headed their dogs for Prince Albert, Connor, at least, feeling that Fate had handed him a load of bricks.

CHAPTER IV

A BLIND ALLEY

IN the afternoon the disgusted Connor and his henchman arrived back in Prince Albert. The corporal at once presented himself before Inspector Brewster, and rendered his report.

When Connor had finished, the inspector rubbed his hands energetically together; a habit to which he was much addicted when finding reason to be pleased, and which always annoyed Connor unreasonably.

"Good!" he exclaimed with a smile. "Good!"

Connor said nothing, but he fervently wished that he were in the position where he could allow himself the luxury of a frown of displeasure. The inspector's trick of hand-rubbing was bad enough, but the smirk of smug satisfaction on the inspector's face, which accompanied it, was almost more than a man of spirit and mettle could stand. But as any demonstration was quite outside the realm of practical politics, Connor had to bear the unprepossessing aspect of the pleased inspector with outward stoicism and Christian fortitude.

"The case is quite clear now," fared the inspector forth. "We have received information that Turner got a job at the lumber-camp at Muskrat Lake the day after he got fired by Brandon. And Muskrat Lake is somewhere up that way, isn't it?"

"Yessir. Muskrat Lake is about six miles west of the Lac la Ronge trail, a few miles north of the place where we lost the fugitive's trail."

"Quite. Quite. It all fits in beautifully"—an extra-specially energetic burst of hand-rubbing, which almost brought the distracted Connor on the verge of a court martial—"with your observations. Everything points towards Turner. Now, I want you to proceed to Muskrat Lake to-morrow morning, and to arrest that man Turner."

"Very good, sir. But in case he should have left the camp, shall I hunt around and try to pick up his trail?"

"Why should he have left the camp?" demanded the inspector brusquely. It always annoyed him when his subordinates attempted to raise any questions in connection with his orders.

"Well, sir," answered Connor respectfully, "it only struck me that this man Turner may think it highly probable that he will come under suspicion, in view of his fracas with Brandon and all that. And in that case I should hardly think he would return to the camp, where he knows he can be easily found."

"You'll find him at the camp all right," declared the inspector. "All those woodsmen are a stupid, stolid lot, who never reason very far. So I feel quite confident that Turner will think he has covered his tracks so well by breaking his trail on the Lac la Ronge road that he will consider himself quite safe at Muskrat Lake." He paused and reflected for a few minutes. "But, of course, if he should have left the camp," he continued, "you'll have to throw about for his trail. One should think that was quite self-evident, so that there should be no necessity for telling you expressly." He glared accusingly at Connor, sounding quite peeved.

"Yessir," murmured Connor meekly, though he was wondering what sticky things would have happened to him in case he had actually followed his own devices, and had chased off somewhere without having been expressly told.

"All right. Get off first thing to-morrow morning," was the inspector's parting injunction.

Connor saluted and left the office, feeling rather pleased with life. He felt quite convinced that he had a long, glorious trail ahead of him. He knew the inspector was quite wrong in his estimation of the woodsmen. Inspector Brewster did not know them. Having never served in the ranks, he had had no opportunity of coming in close contact with them. But Connor had known them for years, had lived right amongst them. And he knew that, though they might appear rather dull and heavy outside their own sphere, in their proper element they were shrewd, observant, and resourceful. So Connor felt quite confident that Turner would long ago have understood that Muskrat Lake was no asylum for him, and would have made tracks for fresh fields. And in that case . . . Oh, boy! And Connor was whistling cheerfully to himself as he went off to make his preparations.

And bright and early on the following morning he was "mushing" along the Lac la Ronge trail behind his dog-train. The sun was shining, the snow was sparkling, and the air was calm, though cold. All in all, Connor felt that life was well worth living.

Here he was, free as the birds in the air, with a long trail before him. The probability of finding Turner at Muskrat Lake he had definitely discarded as undue and unfounded pessimism.

Connor liked a long trail in the woods. The excessive cold never bothered him particularly. Of course he was never over enthusiastic when bound to cross open stretches of muskeg or any of the lakes. There was always a stinging breeze sweeping across those open levels which caused much unpleasantness to the traveller's unprotected face. And the forfeit of such crossings was usually a frozen nose, cheek, or chin; often all combined. But once back in the shelter of the tall timber a spell of brisk rubbing of the afflicted parts with snow soon fixed the damage. And there was plenty to counterbalance any petty annoyances. First and foremost the untrammelled freedom

of the woods. One felt one's own master up there, lord of all one surveyed. A fellow could come and go as he liked, according to his own devices and logic, without being tied down to strictly limited and defined scopes of activity by unimaginative superiors.

Connor was not hurrying particularly. By pushing ahead at full speed, he could easily have made the camp that night. But that did not suit his book. Of course, he had the rooted theory that Turner was not at the camp, but at the same time his mind was elastic. He had seen some of the soundest theories explode dismally in the past, so he had long ago given up building on theories alone, without showing due regard to the alternatives. And for that reason he decided to proceed as if he were quite convinced of finding Turner at Muskrat Lake camp. And if Connor should arrive at night, and find Turner there, he would have to arrest the latter when he was surrounded by his pals. And Connor knew from past experiences that such a course might cause serious complications.

Quite a few, if not all, of Turner's comrades might object to the arrest—not because of any particular animosity against the police, but merely from a mistaken sense of loyalty towards their team-mate—and that would mean a fight, which had to be avoided. Not that the prospect of a scuffle held any terror for Connor, but in the *mêlée* Turner might make good his escape, and make Connor look a fool. And, what was far worse, the ringleaders would have to be arrested, which would seriously hamper the activities of the camp. And all such contingencies had to be taken into consideration.

So Connor decided to camp somewhere in the woods for the night, a couple of miles or so from the camp. He would then go up on the following morning, when the men were out in the woods. Then he could arrest Turner quietly, before the others had time to organize any opposition—if Turner was there! And Woof has decreed

in his wisdom that Turner was, so Turner was in duty bound to be there, decided Connor with a broad grin.

He found a nice camp-site close beside the branch-trail leading up to Muskrat Lake, and he spent a quiet, comfortable night there according to his views. After a satisfying breakfast he started out for the lumber-camp, which was only about three miles away.

When he drove into the camp there were no humans in evidence, but Connor knew where humanity could be found. He made a bee-line for the cook-shack, halted his dogs, and boldly entered the cook's holy of holies.

"Hallo, Corporal," greeted the cook, who had watched Connor's advent through the window. "Haven't seen you for a long time now. How are you?"

"Well, hello, Doc. How are you, you old sour-dough? So you are cooking for this outfit?"

"Doc" was an old-timer who had been cooking in lumber-camps for years, and who was well known to all who had been roaming the forests. His name by right and law was plain, unromantic William Smith, but he was universally known as Doc, though there were no records of his ever having been connected with the medical or any other branch of science.

"Sit down, Corporal, an' have a hot cup o' coffee," invited Doc hospitably. He and Connor were friends of long standing.

"I think I will, though I'm in a bit of a hurry," said Connor, discarding his caribou-coat and drawing a chair up to the table.

As Doc bustled around he suddenly caught sight of a fact which he had overlooked before, to wit: that the trail stopped at the camp, and that Connor for that reason was not merely paying a social call in passing.

His suspicion and curiosity were aroused at once.

"Say, Corporal, who are you after up here?" he demanded, as he poured out a cup of steaming coffee from the ever-ready pot on the stove.

"Not you, I'm sorry to say," grinned Connor, taking the proffered cup and sampling the beverage with relish. "But listen, Doc. Have you got a fellow working here called Ben Turner?"

"Sure have. Been here for near a fortnight. What's he gone an' done?"

"I mean, is he still working here?"

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as to admit that," answered Doc cautiously. "At least, he left with the crew for the woods this mornin', but whether he's workin' is another question. He doesn't strike me as a guy who's wildly crazy about work at any time, though his appetite is fust rate, as I can testify. What's he done?" he demanded again.

But Connor did not answer immediately. He sat staring at Doc in frank amazement.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he exclaimed at last. "You mean to say he's still here?" he asked, unable to believe that he had heard right.

"I mean just that. But what's he done?" persisted Doc a little impatiently.

But Connor hardly heard his query. His own thoughts demanded his undivided attention just then. In the first place, Doc's words had exploded his rosy and optimistic dream of a long patrol with a *bang*! Secondly, a further source for extreme annoyance, that ass Woof had been right after all. But in that case Turner must be a damned fool. But was he? Or . . . ? Dash it! That may be it! A tremendous suspicion had come to him.

"Say, Doc!" he cried. "Has Turner had any time off since he started working for this outfit, or has he been working steady?"

"He's been here regularly for meal-times, anyhow," answered Doc, speaking with authority. "That guy is always the first at table an' the last to quit. Yes. He's been here steady since he fust arrove. But what's he wanted for?" impatiently insisted Doc, who considered

that his thirst for information had not at all met with the attention to which it was entitled.

"Oh, he's not wanted for anything now," sighed Connor with deep disgust. He had certainly bumped up against a nastier, stickier snag than he was prepared to laugh away. Obviously Turner was quite innocent, and he was on the wrong track entirely. The police would have to start all over again from the beginning, and as far as he could see, they had nothing to start on. With Turner out of the game there was simply no lead anywhere. But that would have to wait till he got back.

But perhaps Turner had been an indirect party. . . .

"Say, come out o' it," broke Doc's voice in on his reverie. "Don't fall asleep. Remember you ain't tol' me nothing so fur what it's all about." There were complaint and accusation in Doc's voice.

Connor then told him about the killing of Dave Brandon, being frequently interrupted by comments from Doc, which were as honest as they were forceful and profane. Connor also told his interested auditor about the fight between Brandon and Turner, the latter's subsequent threats, and their own natural suspicions.

"Well, you'll have to rule Turner out o' it, I reckon," observed Doc, when Connor had finished his story. "Though I don't blame you any for suspicioning him," he added generously. "I ain't stuck on him myself, an' reckon he's the kin' o' guy that's liable to start anything. But seein' he can't be in two places at the same time, I can't see how he could 'a' done it."

"I see that for myself, so you needn't rub it in," growled Connor. "But he may have had a hand in it. Perhaps he has got somebody else to do the job for him. Anyhow, I've better go along and question him. Even if he has had nothing to do with this business he may be able to give me a tip. Is the foreman around? I have better see him too."

"They are both out with the crew. Just follow the

sleigh-tracks. It ain't much more 'an a mile to where they's workin'. Have another cup o' coffee before you start?"

"No, thanks, Doc. I've had plenty. I like your coffee and your cookies though, and I'll make a point of visiting you again first time I get a chance," smiled Connor. "Well, so-long, old-timer."

Corporal Connor's arrival caused quite a flutter among the lumber-men, and quite a few began to run rapidly over in their minds their past deeds and misdeeds, trying to form an approximate estimate of their standing in the eyes of the law.

"Hello, Corporal. What have we all been doing now?" asked Campbell, the foreman, who had walked across to Connor.

"Hello, Campbell," smiled Connor, shaking hands. "So far as I can make out you have done nothing. At least nothing that has been found out. But I want a few words with you."

He led the foreman aside, out of hearing of the rest of the crew.

"You have got a fellow called Ben Turner working for you, I understand?" began Connor.

"Sure. That's him over there," said Campbell, indicating a hefty lumber-jack who was just then trimming a felled spruce-tree, and who did not appear to take more interest in them than the rest of the gang.

"How long has he been working for you?" continued Connor.

"Let's see," said Campbell reflectively. "He came here on the twentieth or twenty-first o' last month. But I can give you the exact date if you come back to the office with me."

"It isn't necessary. But tell me: has he had any time off since he started work here?"

"Nope. He hasn't been out o' camp since I took him on," stated Campbell positively.

"Oh, well. That's what Doc told me, but I had to have corroborative evidence."

"How much?" suspiciously asked Campbell, who was a staunch supporter of plain, unadorned English.

"I had to have somebody to back up Doc's statement," explained Connor with a grin. "But I should like to have a talk with Turner."

"You are quite welcome. But what's it all about?"

Connor told him, and as he unfolded the tale Campbell's comments far surpassed Doc's previous efforts in brilliance and polished finish. Brandon had been a close friend of his, and this was the first he had heard about the tragedy.

"Dam' good thing for Turner he has been here all the time, an' has a clear al—al—well, whatever it's called," he growled when Connor had finished. "If I thought Ben Turner had had a han' in this I would 'a' done him in myself, and saved you, the judge, an' the hangman lots o' your time. But I guess Turner is innocent. Anyhow, he's been aroun' here steady since he first came, so that lets him out. An' somehow he doesn't strike me as a fellow who'd shoot a man down from ambush just because he had a grudge against him. Though I'll admit he's a pretty tough proposition. But we'll have him over here, an' ask him what he knows about it. Hey! Turner!" he shouted. "Just step over here for a moment."

Turner straightened up and looked across.

"Who? Me?" he bellowed back.

"Sure! Step along!"

Turner put down his axe and walked across, followed by the avidly curious eyes of his comrades.

"Look here, Turner," began the corporal without preamble, when Turner had got up to them, "Dave Brandon was murdered a few days ago—last Wednesday, to be exact."

"What's that? Dave Brandon murdered?" interrupted Turner, his face expressing nothing but natural amazement. "How did it happen, an' who done it?"

"We don't know yet. Somebody ambushed him on the trail back to camp, when he was returning from Prince Albert with the monthly pay-roll. The murderer had blocked the trail with a spruce, had hidden himself behind a tree, and he shot Brandon through the head when the sleigh pulled up before the obstacle. After that he took the whole pay-roll, over two thousand dollars, and cleared out. Do you know anything about this, Turner?"

"First I heard about it. An' why should I know anything about it?" asked Turner curiously.

"Well, it has been reported that you have been uttering certain threats against Brandon," explained Connor significantly, watching Turner keenly.

Turner turned the corporal's words over for a few moments in his not over-quick brain, but suddenly he discovered the drift of the remarks, and the effect was galvanic.

"Dam' you!" he grated, his face working with fury, while his big fists closed and unclosed, as if he wanted to crush somebody or something. "Do you think I done it? Me shoot a man down from ambush just because I had a small grouch against him? I'll admit I was aimin' to pay Brandon back for the lickin' he gave me, but, dam' it, I'm not skunk enough to shoot a fellow down from behin'! Curse you! Do I look like a murderer?"

Connor looked Turner over critically. The object of his scrutiny had never possessed features which could by any stretch of imagination be called gentle or prepossessing, but now, convulsed as they were with rage, they looked downright repulsive. And Connor decided quickly that he could not honestly disprove Turner's query. So he decided to pass it tactfully by. At least Connor felt quite convinced in his own mind that Turner had not had any hand in the matter, not even indirectly. His amazement and subsequent rage had been too artless and spontaneous for that.

"No. Nobody thinks you did it," he assured Turner.

"I have got proof that you were right here when the murder took place. But I thought you could perhaps give me some clue to the man who did it. Do you know of anybody who had it in for Brandon, or who would be likely to be mixed up in a thing like this?"

Turner had calmed down rapidly when he heard that he was not a suspect. He thought long and earnestly, but at last he shook his head.

"No," he said. "I can't think o' anybody who'd be skunk enough to do a low trick like that. An' I don't know that Brandon had any enemies to speak o'. He was pretty well liked by all the boys. Of course, I had a grudge again' him, but that was just personal. No, I can't think o' nothing to help youse."

"Are you quite sure?" asked Connor, hoping to pick up something, however vague. Something that could give him an opening. "Think again."

Turner thought, but at long last had to pronounce the effort wasted.

"Nope. I can't think o' nobody nor nothin' a-tall."

"Oh, well," sighed Connor. "I've better hurry along back to town, and see what we can do there. Well, good-bye, Campbell; good-bye, Turner." He shook hands with both, and turned his dogs down the trail again.

As soon as he had left, the crew crowded around Campbell and Turner, clamouring for their bubbling curiosity to be allayed. Campbell found their demand quite proper and in order, and he lost no time in delving with zest and gusto into the subject.

CHAPTER V

A NEW TRAIL

CONNOR left Muskrat Lake camp a sorely disappointed and disillusioned man. The sun was shining, the snow was sparkling, and the air was calm, though cold. Nature was just the same as yesterday. Only, to Connor the whole world had changed its aspect, and he felt that life was a complete wash-out as he trailed disconsolately behind his sleigh towards Prince Albert.

He did not arrive back in town till shortly before midnight, so it was not possible for him to render his report that night. But as soon as he heard that Inspector Brewster had arrived in his office on the following morning, he set off to interview him.

As he walked along to the inspector's office he wondered vaguely if Woof would blame him for Turner's deplorable innocence. At least he felt quite convinced that Woof would be far from pleased at the turn of events, and that he would give tangible proof of his displeasure.

"Well, Corporal, did you get that man Turner?" was the inspector's cheery good morning. "Was he up at that camp?"

"Yessir. He was at the camp, but I didn't arrest him," answer Connor.

"What? You didn't arrest him?" asked the inspector, glaring at the corporal. "Why not?" he snapped.

"Well, sir, I found out he was innocent." And Connor gave an account of what had transpired up at Muskrat Lake.

"But he may have been the instigator of the affair for all that," barked the inspector.

"I am quite convinced he has had nothing whatever to do with it, sir. His rage, when I hinted as much, was too spontaneous and genuine to be simulated."

"Your convictions have nothing to do with the question at all," barked the inspector, who was possessed of the rooted idea that reasoning and initiative were prerogatives exclusively belonging to commissioned appointments. "You were ordered to arrest that man, an order which you have flagrantly disobeyed."

"Excuse me, sir. But under the circumstances I thought it would have been a violation of the superintendent's specific instructions to arrest that man," remarked Connor meekly. But he was rather proud of his sentence. He found it rather neat. "Hot stuff!" he whispered with vast complacency to his immortal soul, though his face expressed nothing but polite deference.

He had scored a bull's-eye, and the inspector knew it. And, what was worse, the latter knew that Connor knew that he knew it.

One of Inspector Brewster's pet weaknesses was a tendency to run in everybody and everything having the remotest connection with any crime committed, on the principle that at least one out of the bag must be guilty. But Superintendent Trench, the commanding officer of the Division, had frowned on his zeal, and had issued strict orders that a reasonable discretion was to be exercised in the matter of arrests. No individual was to be apprehended except when there were reasonable indications that he was directly connected with some outrage had been his dictum. There was nothing that would damage the prestige of the police more effectively than senseless and promiscuous arrests of innocent people he contended.

So Inspector Brewster was checkmated for the moment. He started fussing about with the papers on his desk, his

usual attitude when confused, while he thought frantically of something to say which would help save his face. But he drew a blank, and had to let the matter drop.

"I suppose you have no suggestion to make as to who actually committed the crime, Corporal?" he asked, looking up at Connor.

"No, sir. Not at present, sir."

"No, I thought as much. All right. I'll send for you later; as soon as I've seen the superintendent."

Connor saluted and withdrew, feeling quite satisfied with the interview. He felt he was one up on Woof, and he lost no time in passing on this pleasing bit of information to his colleagues.

"So Turner was the wrong man," remarked Superintendent Trench a little later, after Brewster had acquainted him with the result of Connor's quest. "That makes it rather awkward. Leaves us very little, if anything, to go on. Well, you've better send Connor up to see Langren, and go over the whole matter with him again."

"Wouldn't it be better, sir, to have Langren in here?" suggested the inspector.

"No. That will hardly be necessary. It is much better to have Connor go along to the camp, where he can have a talk with the whole crew. Someone of the lot may be able to give a useful hint. And we can't have the whole crew in here, you know."

Inspector Brewster knew nothing of the sort. Personally, he thought it would have been an excellent scheme to have the whole crew formed into a procession, have them marched up to the Barracks, and then have them scientifically interrogated. But with commendable discretion he kept his views to himself. Superintendent Trench could be very caustic at times.

"Connor is a pretty sound lad," continued the superintendent, "and he will find out whatever there is to find out. You might tell him, Brewster, not to pass up any

little thing, however insignificant, as long as it seems to have any bearing on the case."

"Very well, sir. I'll get him off straight away," said Brewster, and he hustled back to his own office, where he sent for Connor.

"See here, Corporal," said Brewster as soon as Connor had entered his office. "I want you to go out and see this man Langren at his camp about this Brandon case. Now, I want you to make exhaustive inquiries throughout the camp, and gather all the information possible. And I want you to be particularly attentive. Before all, don't pass up any little thing, however trivial it may appear to you. You understand?"

"Yessir."

"I want you to start at once. And try to produce more satisfactory results on your return than you did over that Muskrat Lake trip," jabbed the inspector.

"Very well, sir." And Connor left the office, fondly toying with the idea of quitting the police so that he could tell Woof with impunity exactly what he thought of him.

Half an hour later Connor was on his way. The trails were still good, and his dogs dragged the light sleigh with ease.

When he arrived at the place where Brandon had been killed, he found everything about the same as on his previous visit. There had been little or no traffic over the trail since then, and the stain on the white snow was still undisturbed, only it had now turned black. The carcass of the horse, frozen as hard as a solid lump of ice, and the spruce-bole were still lying where Langren and Hawkins had left them.

Connor once more went carefully all over the ground, hoping he might find some clue which he had overlooked on his first visit. But his efforts were utterly wasted.

He had always been an earnest student of detective literature, and he had gathered the idea that criminals invariably made some mistake, and left some clue behind,

but, he decided with a sigh, either the authorities were not to be trusted or this must be the exception to the rule. Or perhaps, he admitted after some further reflections, he lacked the constitutional attributes and talents of a sleuth.

He looked up at the tall spruces lining each side of the trail.

"Dam' you!" he growled, shaking his fist at them. "You saw it all. Why can't you help a fellow out instead of standing there like a bunch of prunes with your noses in the air?"

But his exclamation had no other result than that a squirrel appeared high up on a branch and gazed curiously down at him. But it disappeared precipitately, jabbering indignant abuse, when Connor threw a lump of snow at it.

Connor grinned, and continued on his way to the camp.

Dusk was well advanced by the time he arrived, and the crew, except for the teamsters, who were busy around the stables, was assembled in the bunk-house.

The corporal's entry caused a considerable stir. They all flocked around him, and a flood of excited queries swept over him.

"Have you got the —— skunk of a ——?"

"Have you got that——?"

"Hope they hang that——!"

"Hangin' is too dam' good for a —— o' a —— like him!" etc., etc., *fortissimo* and in chorus.

"Shut up, all o' you!" yelled Langren into the babel, forcing his way through the crowd to Connor's side. "How the hell can you expect the corporal to tell us anythin' as long as you all is cacklin' at him like a bunch o' wimmen? Dry up! an' give him a chance. Did you fin' Turner, Corporal?"

"I did. He is up at the Muskrat Lake camp. But he didn't do it."

"? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?"

"How do you figger that?" asked Langren.

Connor explained, but growls from the crowd indicated that they were not at all convinced of Turner's innocence.

"Bet he hired someone to do the job," postulated one.

"Just what I was thinkin'," agreed another.

"If Ben didn't do it, who did?" asked a third, who obviously was of the opinion that this line of brilliant logic destroyed Turner's alibi at once.

"Shut up, all o' you, an' let the corporal talk for a while!" shouted Langren. "I never saw a worse bunch for wantin' to admire the soun' o' your voices. Who'd you think did it, corporal?"

"Haven't an idea so far," admitted Connor. "All I know is that Turner is quite innocent. But I want to talk it all over with you fellows, and see if we can't dig up something between us to go on. That's the reason I'm here."

There was a murmur of approval from the crowd. They all felt that Connor had acted very wisely in his choice of co-advisers, and indications were not lacking that they were willing and eager to prove their worth forthwith. But the despotic Langren would have none of it.

"Hol' on now," he warned. "We have to go at this slow an' systematic-like. An' it's no use goin' ahead before the teamsters are all here. So I vote we wait till we have fed. Cookie'll be givin' us a shout any time now. An' anyhow, a fellow can always think better on full guts. You'll have grub with us, an' stay the night, won't you, Corporal?"

"Well, I never pass up the offer of a meal, but as to spending the night here, I'm afraid you are rather crowded," answered Connor diplomatically. To spend the night in the bunk-house did not appeal to him for several reasons. "So I think I've better camp somewhere on the trail."

"Plenty o' room in my quarters," suggested Langren hospitably. "I'm all alone in the foreman's shack. I'm foreman now," he explained with a grin. "An' you're quite welcome to stay with me."

"All right, thanks, I will," said Connor. "I've better get my dogs out of the harness, and chained up before grub-pile. Do you think the cook would mind if I thaw out some fish for the dogs in his kitchen?"

Langren looked doubtful.

"Guess Cookie is a bit particular about his cook-shack," he remarked deprecatingly, "so he mightn't like it. You have better take the fish across to my shack. The stove is goin' full blast over there, an' we can easy leave the door open for a while after to get out the smell o' fish. I'll go along with you an' give you a han'."

Some twenty minutes later Cookie made known in his usual energetic and nerve-racking manner that grub was ready.

Cookie was a man with a keen perception of the claims of hospitality, and he took special care of the guest.

"Dig in an' eat hearty, Corporal," he invited encouragingly. "I always like to see a man eat hearty. A good appetite shows an easy min' an' conscience is my motter."

And the corporal found it quite easy to prove his unburdened mind. The cook was a master-hand at his particular trade.

"Say, Corporal," remarked Cookie presently, on one of his periodical trips between the kitchen and the table, "ain't you got some fish to thaw out for your dogs? Just tell me where they are an' I'll go get 'em an' put 'em in front o' the cooking-range."

"Thank you, Cookie. It isn't necessary. I put the fish up against the stove in Langren's shack," explained Connor with a smile. "I was afraid to muck up your kitchen."

"Oh, shucks. I ain't as particular about my kitchen as all that. Anybody's always welcome to have the use o' it for any little thing like that. I like givin' a fellow a han' when I can."

While Cookie had been delivering himself of this altruistic homily, one of the men at the table had been struggling hard to hurry down a refractory mouthful of potato, and by generous application of coffee and energetic swallowing, he succeeded. He had a duty to perform in the cause of Truth.

"Say, Cookie!" he cried, protest in his voice, "that's not what you tol' me the other day, when I came into your dam'd kitchen to thaw out some frozen bits o' harness I was goin' to repair. You tol' me your kitchen was no saddler's shop, an' tol' me to clear out at once. An' you tol' me with trimmings, too. An' if I hadn't been quick, an' had ducked instanter, you would 'a' caught me with a wet, greasy dish-rag plumb in my face."

The table laughed, and for a moment the cook looked nonplussed, but he rallied quickly.

"Well, that's different," he said with quiet, becoming dignity. "Fish is food, an' belongs in a kitchen. But ol' greasy, dirty, stinkin' harness-leather doesn't belong there nohow. It taints the food; an' I'm willin' to bet that you would 'a' been the first to raise a holler if your food had tasted like a saddler's shop."

And having delivered this broadside, Cookie stalked majestically off to his domain with a load of dishes, feeling that he had scored a moral victory.

As soon as the last man had pushed back from the table Cookie hurriedly began clearing away the remaining dishes. He piled them all into the kitchen, where, he decided, they would have to look after themselves for a while. He did not want to miss any of the forthcoming deliberations. Having the firm and rooted conviction that he represented The Brains of the camp, he felt the

council would be a failure from the start without his valuable co-operation.

At last he had finished, and he forthwith propped himself up against the kitchen-door casing in his favourite position: legs crossed and arms akimbo.

"Seein' we are now all here, Corporal," began Langren, "perhaps you'll let us know what's in your min'."

"There's nothing in my mind, that's the trouble," grinned Connor. "But I want you all to think as hard as you can, if there is anybody who had it in for Brandon, and who would be likely to have done a thing like that murder. It must have been somebody who was pretty well up in Brandon's routine, and who knew he would be going in for the pay-roll on the last of the month, returning the following day. Now see if you can think of a fellow that this fits. Take your time, but think carefully."

The crew thought. They all thought long and earnestly, deep furrows of concentration being much in evidence. Heavy brain-work did not come easily to them. And the only sounds which broke the silence in the temple of meditation were the occasional "Plops!" from the lips of energetic pipe-suckers.

But, one by one, they had to give up the effort as fruitless. They shook their heads and mumbled that they "couldn't think o' nobody nohow" who could have done it. At least, nobody besides Turner. And with Turner out of the game they frankly declared themselves stumped.

"Brandon was well thought o' o' all who knew him, as far I remember," did one voice his thoughts. "That is, all but Turner. I don't know o' nobody else who had a grudge agin him. What about you fellows? You know o' anybody?"

They all slowly and regretfully shook their heads.

"Guess Turner had a han' in it somewheres," insisted

another. "I'm admittin' he couldn't 'a' done it hisself, but I guess he hired somebody to do it for him. Some Injun, perhaps, or——"

"Charley Crow!" shouted Cookie, pushing away from his support in his excitement. "Say! That's just the sneaky kin' o' a gent to do a skunk's act like murderin' Brandon an' streakin' off with the pay-roll."

"Gosh, Cookie! I plumb forgot all about Charley," exclaimed Langren. "I guess you called it."

There was an affirmative murmur from the crowd, and they all stared at Cookie, undisguised admiration in their eyes.

Cookie leaned back against the door-casing again, sunning himself in the silent homage accorded him, though he felt he was merely being given his due. In his own modest opinion he had once again proved his title to the claim of being the intellectual champion of the camp.

"I suspicioned all along that it wasn't the act o' any white man," he asserted unblushingly, though he had suspected nothing of the sort. "Looked too much like an Injun's work to me. But somehow I'd forgotten all about Charley till this minute," he admitted with manly frankness.

Of course this new aspect of the case called for comments. The inmates of the bunk-house were at once of one opinion with Cookie. Turner was exonerated forthwith and given a clean bill. They had all "suspicioned," it now transpired, that Brandon's murder had been the act of an "Injun." And so Charley Crow was forthwith and unanimously found guilty, with the same ease and dispatch with which the same verdict had been pronounced against Turner in the first place. And they all tried to talk at once in an endeavour to present their weighty reasons for their finding. But Connor, who found that his position as primarily interested party was being disregarded, checked the bubbling exuberance.

"Hold on a minute!" he shouted. "Let me get a word in edgeways, at least. Who's this fellow Charley Crow?"

They all tried to enlighten him at once and at the same time, at the utter cost of comprehension, so Langren thought it time for him to restore some modicum of order and sanity.

"Shut up! Shut up, all o' you!" he yelled, glaring at his corps of assistants. "One would think this was a political meetin' the way you cut up. Now close them traps o' yourn while I explain to the corporal. This fellow, Charley Crow, was an Injun who was workin' up here for a spell as a teamster," he addressed Connor. "An' he quit a few days before Dave was killed. Said he was sick. I brought him into town myself. That was the time I picked up them three Scandinavians over there," he ended, pointing at the trio which was sitting at the end of the room, valiantly striving to follow the proceedings in spite of their linguistic handicap.

"But were there any reasons why that man should kill Brandon? I mean, did he have a grudge against him for any reason?" asked Connor.

"No-o-pe," admitted Langren reluctantly. "I can't say he had. Anyhow, not as far as I know. But Charley was a funny guy, an' you never knew exactly what he thought, or where you had him. He kept most to hisself, an' was very close-mouthed, even for an Injun. We all thought he was a bit touched."

"Oh, them secretive, sneaky kin' o' Injuns you can't never trust," interpolated Cookie, who thought it only fair and right that he, as the originator of this new line of research, should be allowed a say in the matter. "They's liable to start any kin' o' devilry. He was always walkin' aroun' with a mask o' a face, an' never let nobody get a chance o' guessin' what was behin' it."

"You're speakin' gospel, Cookie," spoke up one of the

men. "I sat in quite a few poker-games with that guy, an' many's the pot I lost to him 'cause I could never tell when he was bluffin', or wasn't. That kin' of gink would cut his own gran'mother's throat an' think nothin' o' it," he ended bitterly.

"Where did this Charley Crow hail from?" asked Connor quickly, as he saw that the discussion was on the verge of becoming general.

But on that score he was unable to obtain any positive information. They all agreed that he was a Cree and had come from up north somewhere, but further details were vague. One man said he thought Charley belonged somewhere up in the Lac la Ronge district. At least Charley knew that district well, judging from stray remarks he had let drop. But the informant would not guarantee that he was right.

"Oh, say! I just thought o' something," exclaimed Langren. "I remember when Charley quit Dave wanted him to stay till pay-day, seein' it was only a few days off, but Charley was set solid on quittin' straight away. Dave was quite sore about it, I remember. Perhaps Charley had already made up his min' then to go for that pay-roll, an' that was the reason he wanted to quit so sudden."

This called for general discussion, and it did not take long for the assembly to decide that Langren had ably stated the true facts.

The only one who was dubious was Connor. The circumstantial evidence against Turner had been considerably stronger, and that had hopelessly collapsed. Looking calmly and judiciously at the matter, Connor decided that the evidence against Charley Crow was too flimsy to be considered as evidence at all. He knew quite well the attitude of the average woodsman towards Indians in general, so he was aware that the views expressed by the crew could not be taken too seriously. Any piece of devilry committed anywhere they would

invariably blame on the nearest Indian if no other more probable scapegoat should be handy. So Connor was far from convinced.

He talked the whole matter over with Langren again that night in the foreman's shack, but without eliciting any fact which could help strengthen the evidence against Charley Crow, or which would tend to throw any light on the affair. So as he could not pick up any other useful information he had to be thankful for the crumbs he had gleaned. At least it was a theory which he could hand lovingly to Woof, and then the latter gentleman could do with it what he liked. Though, he admitted candidly, the gift was not wildly extravagant.

He left for town on the following morning, followed by the good wishes of the inmates of the camp, to which were coupled various ingenious, heartfelt, and blood-curdling suggestions for Charley Crow's ultimate fate.

Inspector Brewster was still in his office when Connor arrived back, and the latter at once acquainted his critical superior with the results of his quest.

"H'm. Not much in that," grunted the inspector when Connor had finished. "However, we have better get some information about this Charley Crow. You said Langren dropped him by those shacks down by the river, where the half-breeds and Indians usually put up?"

"Yessir."

"Good. We'll start from there then. All right, Corporal, that's all. Report back to the sergeant-major for duty."

Connor withdrew from the office a sorely disappointed man. He had hoped that the further investigations would be left in his hands, but evidently Woof had other ideas.

"Oh, hell!" did Connor tersely and ably sum up the situation to himself as he went in search of the sergeant-major.

The intelligence-machinery of the police was once more set in motion, and results were soon forthcoming.

Four days later Inspector Brewster entered the superintendent's office, looking rather pleased with himself.

"I have got the report on that man Charley Crow, sir," he announced, "and it certainly looks as if we are getting somewhere in this Brandon case at last. There are several indications which point towards him as the man we are looking for." The inspector was about to rub his hands together, discovered that he carried a paper in one of them, and had to forego the pleasure, much to his chagrin.

"Well, let's hear the report," suggested Superintendent Trench.

"This man, Charley Crow, is an Indian from the Lac la Ronge district," began the inspector, having recourse to the paper in his hand. "He came down here last fall and got a job as a teamster with Brandon's outfit. From all reports this Charley Crow is universally considered somewhat queer. He is not even popular with his own people. He always seems to have been very reticent and secretive; in fact, a recluse to some extent. But these are the significant facts: when he arrived back in town after having left Brandon's camp, he bought five dogs and a sleigh. I have got the name of the vendor, and a description of the dogs here in the report. Charley Crow informed people that he was going back home to go out trapping. He left town three days before Brandon was found murdered.

"Now, sir, you remember Connor reported that he had discovered traces of five dogs up in that camp he discovered near the Lac la Ronge trail. Very well. Now my theory is this: when Charley Crow left here, he travelled up to that place where Connor found the camp. He probably spent the night there, and on the following morning he went south to the camp-trail,

leaving the dogs behind. After he had killed Brandon and got the money, he probably hurried back, picked up his dogs, and then continued up towards Lac la Ronge. Don't you think that theory sounds quite reasonable? "

The inspector looked optimistically at the superintendent.

"Humph. Sounds dam'ed thin to me," was the latter's terse, rather unkind, comment. "You can't draw any conclusions whatever from the number of dogs. At least nine out of ten people up in this part of the country use five dogs in their teams. So it is quite impossible to deduce from the fact that Charley Crow left town with five dogs that he is identical with the man who occupied the camp Connor found. Nor is there any evidence whatever that the occupant of that camp had any hand in Brandon's death. And with that evidence thrown out, the only reason why Charley Crow should be suspected are the circumstances that he worked for Brandon and that he is a rather doubtful citizen, as far as I can see. And I suppose there are plenty of others who are in that category. And any of those others may have concocted that brilliant scheme of getting his hand on Brandon's pay-roll. So you have better get busy and get as complete a list as possible of all the individuals who left this town for the north around the time of the murder."

"Very well, sir," murmured the inspector, sounding as if he was of the opinion that the world was treating him badly. "But shall we do nothing about this man Crow in the meantime? "

"Rather. We'll get hold of him and have a heart-to-heart talk with him," said the superintendent. "Let me see. . . . Corporal Connor has been in charge of the case so far, hasn't he? "

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Send him up to Lac la Ronge to find that fellow. Connor is easily the best woodsman we have got

here, so he's just the man for the job. Instruct the corporal to have Charley Crow brought in here; except, of course, he can produce an absolutely indisputable alibi."

"Very well, sir." And Inspector Brewster hurried off to his own office and at once sent for Connor.

"Now, Connor," began the inspector as soon as the corporal had entered the office, "I want you to go up to Lac la Ronge at once and find that man Charley Crow. There are several indications that he is responsible for Brandon's death," he stated, deciding to ignore the superintendent's doubts, which he considered utterly unreasonable. "Here is the report we have on him. I want you to study it carefully." He handed the paper to Connor. "Now be sure to bring that man back if he can't produce an absolutely sound, solid alibi. And when I say sound, solid alibi, I mean one that is borne out by white people of good repute. I want you particularly to understand that you can't attach any importance to the evidence of any Indian in a case like this, where a tribesman is concerned."

"I understand, sir," patiently admitted Connor, who had had a firm grasp on that important fact for years.

"Very well. And when can you be ready to start?"

"I'll start this afternoon, sir, and camp somewhere on the trail to-night."

"Right. The sooner you get off the better. Don't waste any time, and see you bring back some results," was the inspector's warning injunction.

"Very good, sir." And Connor departed, fondly praying that Charley Crow would not prove to be another disappointment. He knew that if he returned without a prisoner this time, Woof would be hard to live with for some time to come.

CHAPTER VI

THE END OF CORPORAL CONNOR'S TRAIL

CONNOR hurriedly made his preparations for his trip, and early in the afternoon he pulled out, followed by the envious eyes of several of his comrades.

He felt well pleased with the turn of events as he chased after his dog-team up the Lac la Ronge trail. This was the life, he told himself with great complacency and satisfaction. The only drawback was that there were far too few opportunities for patrols into the north when one was stationed in Prince Albert. One's activities were mostly limited to patrols on horseback on the prairie around, and if there was one thing to fill a man with misery and misanthropy in this world, it was horseback riding on the open prairie in the middle of the winter, did Connor tell himself frankly.

On the afternoon of the fourth day Connor arrived at the Hudson's Bay Company's post at Lac la Ronge. He was received with great enthusiasm by Mr. John Reid, the manager.

"Hello, Connor, old scout!" he cried, as soon as he discovered the identity of the fur-clad individual invading his office. "Damned glad to see you. We haven't seen a face from outside worth seeing since—well, God only knows."

"Hello, Johnny. And how's your wife and the kids?"

"Fine, thanks. My wife will be dashed pleased to see

you. She just said the other day that she hoped one of you boys would turn up soon. And the two youngsters will fall all over you. Ever since Constable Hancock was up here last summer they have both decided to join the police when they grow up, so they can walk around with red tunic, revolver, and riding-boots with spurs. Of course, with only moccasins and no spurs, you won't be quite in Hancock's class," grinned Reid. "But I suppose they'll forgive you. Of course you'll put up with us?"

"Thank you very much, but won't it be an awful lot of trouble for Mrs. Reid?"

"I'll tell you one thing, old lad, if you *don't* stay with us there *will* be trouble. No, seriously, my wife will only be too glad to have you. How far are you going?"

"Don't know yet. I have to make some inquiries about a fellow around here, and try to find out where he is at present."

"Good," said Reid. "Then you'll be able to stay with us for a few days, at least. Anyhow, we won't discuss business yet a while. Come up to the house and make yourself comfortable first. Don't worry about your dogs and sleigh. I'll get some of my boys to attend to all that." He got out of his chair and shouted some orders into the store.

"How's Tim Malone?" asked Connor, when Reid had returned. Mr. Timothy Malone was the local representative of Revillon Freres Trading Company, the keen rivals of the Hudson's Bay Company.

"Don't mention that Mick's name to me if you want to remain my friend," answered Reid. "That fellow is a robber and a pirate."

"What's he done now?" asked Connor, trying not to grin.

"What's he done? He has done me out of two silver foxes a few days ago, the saturated son of whiskers," growled Reid. "That's what he's done. An Indian came to me the other day with two good skins, and I

offered him five hundred dollars in trade for the two. Well, the Redskin tried to pry another hundred out of me, but I stood pat. I told him to think my offer over and come back the next day. Perhaps we could come to terms then, I said. But do you know what happened? That fellow across there"—he jerked a vicious thumb in the direction of Revillon's stores—"must have heard about it, because he sneaked over to that Indian behind my back and snapped the two skins up for five hundred and fifty, and paid cash for them on the spot. Cool cash, mind you, knowing quite well that an Indian would fall for that. Dirty trick, I call it, when he knew that Indian was my customer. I only hope that when the skins are examined by the experts in Montreal, they'll find they're only worth a couple of hundred, and that he'll get a choking off. But I'm afraid the skins are good," ended Reid with a sigh.

"Dirty trick!" murmured Connor, who knew some such remark was expected. He tried to look shocked and sympathetic, but failed.

"And the worst of it is," continued Reid, loth to forgo his grievance, "that Tim had the nerve to come straight over to me and tell me all about it. He even had the gall to maintain, straight to my face, that we in the Hudson's Bay were lagging behind the times, and that we were clinging to old-fashioned and obsolete methods in dealing with the Indians. Said that the really smart, up-to-date business man snapped up a chance as soon as it offered, and didn't lose any time dilly-dallying. That's how Rockefeller became the man he is to-day, he ended his brazen lecture. Now, I ask you. What can you do with a fellow like that?"

"So you are at war with Tim just now?" asked Connor with a grin. He was enjoying himself.

"Well, it takes two to start a war, and Tim doesn't see it that way," sighed Reid. "He comes around my place just the same as usual. He even told my wife that dirty trick as a good joke, and made her laugh. And I'll

bet you, in about half an hour he'll know about your arrival, and come streaking over, expecting to be asked for supper. And, dash it, if he won't get away with it, too," ended Reid with a grin.

Connor laughed.

"Well, it must be a terrible tribulation to have an unprincipled fellow like that around," he commented. "However, if you are ready, we'll go along to the house. I want to say how-do-you-do to Mrs. Reid."

"Of course I'm ready. I've been ready for a long time. I've only been waiting for you," remarked Reid reprovingly. "However, let's hustle along."

Connor's welcome at the house was not less hearty than the one accorded him in the office.

"You had better kill the fatted calf, Frances," suggested Mrs. Reid's spouse. "And you have better prepare for an extra guest. That nervy Tim across at the French Stores is sure to turn up."

"Of course Tim will turn up," answered Mrs. Reid. "If he doesn't, I'm going to send somebody across to tell him that the corporal has arrived, and that we expect him for supper."

"What did I tell you?" demanded Reid of Connor.

"Has Johnny told you about the joke Tim pulled on him the other day?" asked Mrs. Reid with a smile.

"He did," admitted Connor. "Only 'joke' was not quite the word he used."

"Oh, I know what he calls it," laughed Mrs. Reid. "But it is a joke for all that. And it is good for Johnny to be done down now and again. It helps take the conceit out of his system."

"There you are, Connor," complained Reid in a funereal voice. "That's the kind of low fellow Tim is: coming between a man and his lawful wife. A fellow like that oughtn't to be tolerated by society."

"Yes, it's terrible," admitted his laughing partner in life. "Now you two sit down and make yourselves

comfortable, and I'll have a cup of tea for you in a few minutes."

The two young Masters Reid, the elder about six, and the other four, had looked Connor over with keen interest since his entry. Now the elder, being the more enterprising, walked up to him and asked:

"Where's your revolver?"

"It's hanging outside in the corridor, Johnny," explained Connor with a smile.

"An' have you killed many people with it?" continued the youngster with avid interest.

"No. We don't shoot people in the police."

"Oh? An' why not?"

"Because we are nice people in the police, who don't kill people," explained Connor piously.

"But what do you have the revolver for, then?" continued the boy his cross-examination.

"Just because it looks nice," grinned Connor.

John Reid, junior, made no comment, but looked sorely disappointed.

In the meantime Eddy, the younger, had carefully inspected Connor from afar, standing gravely with his hands on his back.

"Why haven't you got no shiny things on your heels?" he asked suddenly, a little accusingly.

"He means spurs," interpreted the elder with vast superiority.

"No, I don't wear them with moccasins," enlightened Connor.

The youngster turned his remark over in his mind for a few moments.

"I don't like moc'sins," he declared finally with conviction. "I like big, big boots with shiny things on 'em."

"I told you the lack of spurs would lose you some popularity," laughed Reid senior.

Reid's prophecy anent Tim Malone also proved correct.

They had just finished tea when tinkling dog-bells outside announced the arrival of a visitor.

"There's Tim," announced Reid. "I have better sacrifice myself on the altar of hospitality and go give him a hand with his dogs."

He soon returned with Malone, a tall, wiry man with a humorous face and twinkling eyes.

"How are you, Mrs. Reid?" he cried. "And how are you, Connor, old scout? All present and correct? I just heard you had turned up, so I naturally streaked over to hear all the news."

But here order and decorum were interrupted by the younger generation of Reids.

"Uncle Tim, have you brought somethin' for us in your pockets?" they shouted in chorus, flinging themselves at the grinning Malone.

"I sure have," laughed the brevet-uncle. "Here's one bag of candy for you, Johnny, and here's another one for you, Eddy. Now don't gobble it all at once so you get a tummy-ache."

But they paid scant attention to this well-meant piece of advice. With whoops of delight they danced off to sample their spoil.

"That's the kind of fellow Tim is," complained Reid. "Always scattering corruption and bribery around."

"Well, it sure helps pave the way to good feeling and pleasantness all round," grinned Malone unabashed. "And by the way, Connor, remember silver fox is a word that is not mentioned in this household these days. I understand it's a sore point just now."

Mrs. Reid and Connor laughed, and Reid had to follow suit after an experiment to show offended dignity had proved a failure.

"Of course you are staying for supper, Tim?" invited Mrs. Reid.

"Well, to be quite frank and candid, Mrs. Reid, I came over hoping to hear just some such words from you,"

admitted Malone with a smile. "Yes, thank you. I'll stay with pleasure."

"I knew it," groaned Reid. "That fellow doesn't know the meaning of the term modesty."

"No, Johnny. I admit it. That's the reason I'm always seeking your company. I'm trying to learn the nature and deeper significance of the term from your very able demonstrations. But what are you doing up here, Connor?"

"Looking for a fellow. I'll tell you all about it after the kids have gone to bed," said Connor, lowering his voice. "It isn't a very nice business. And I shall want you two chaps to give me a hand."

When they were sitting before the crackling stove in the cosy sitting-room after supper, Mrs. Reid busily knitting on some woollen garment for one of her progeny, Connor told the story about Brandon's murder, and further explained which way their suspicions were pointing.

When he had finished he asked Reid and Malone what they knew about Charley Crow, and further, if they had any idea of his present whereabouts.

"Well, I don't know much about him," confessed Reid. "Of course, I have seen him now and then around the store, and he seemed a rather surly and quiet lad. I heard he had gone down to Prince Albert to look for a job, but I haven't heard that he is back. However, I'll soon find out about that from my men."

"I'm in the same boat as Johnny," remarked Malone. "But it strikes me we have to go about these investigations very quietly and easy. By this time most of the people around here will know that Connor is up here, but they don't know why, yet. And I think it's better we don't enlighten them. If they hear that inquiries are being made about Charley Crow, they'll soon add two and two together, and some kind soul will pass along the warning to Charley, if he is anywhere around. And if he is guilty

he'll streak off at once and make himself hard to find. Wait a minute till I've figured this thing out." For several generations now the Malone family had been Canadians, but the members of the family still prided themselves on having preserved intact their Irish imagination.

"I think I've got a pretty sound scheme," he announced at last. "I think I've got an outstanding bill against Charley Crow, and if I haven't I'll fake up one for the occasion," he declared with a shameless grin. "Tomorrow I'll send Dan Sayese—you know, that half-breed scout of mine, a pretty cute fellow—across to the chief and ask him where Charley can be found, as we want that bill settled at once. Even if the chief doesn't know where Charley is right now, he'll know where his trapping camp is. And chances are that if Charley is in the neighbourhood, he'll be at his camp. And then Connor can go straight along there and look him up, before Charley has any idea what's up. What do you think of the scheme?"

The others thought it quite sound, and said so. And so it was agreed to try it out.

On the following forenoon Connor was straining his imagination in an effort to satiate the apparently unlimited thirst of the Reid youngsters for stories about the Mounted Police. Connor was somewhat at a loss, as the stories which he knew from first and second-hand experiences were hardly suitable for youthful ears, but by dragging forth from the inner recesses of his memory the fairy-tales of his innocent youth, and clothing the knights of virtue in scarlet tunic, Stetson hat, and bespurred Strathcona boots, he managed to keep the good flag flying.

Shortly before noon Tim Malone turned up.

"Dismiss your parade, Corporal," he grinned to the hard-working Connor. "I've got news for you."

But the parade was inclined to demur. However, by dint of diplomatic promises of further stories presently, Connor managed to persuade them to go out and play

for a while, while he discussed business with "Uncle" Tim. Perhaps the box of chocolates which Malone presented to each, on condition they would be good boys, had something to do with their acquiescence.

"Holy smokes!" exclaimed Connor, dabbing his moist brow with his handkerchief. "You really came in the nick of time, Tim, for saving me from complete mental prostration. Well, what did you find out?"

"Not much. The chief didn't know where Charley is at present. All he knew was that Charley had gone to P.A., but he hadn't heard anything about him having returned. But when Dan Sayese told him he had heard Charley had left P.A. to go trapping, the chief said that of course Charley might have gone straight out to his camp. Then he described to Dan the location of Charley's camp. There's a trail turning east from the main trail going north to Beaver Narrows about six miles up. It's the first trail that branches off east. About three miles from where you turn off you get to a stretch of open muskeg. At the north end of that muskeg a creek comes out, just at the spur of a low ridge, and about a couple of miles up along that creek is Charley's camp. The chief said he had built himself a good shack up there, and has been hanging out there most trapping seasons for years. There are no other trapping camps near his. Dan gathered from the chief that Charley was not very neighbourly disposed, and liked to be left to himself. When you go up there you'll most likely pick up Charley's trail on that muskeg, if he has gone up to his camp. But he may, of course, have gone off to some other place. At least, you only need a light sleigh along when you go up there, so you won't have much trouble about breaking trail, even if Charley hasn't done the job for you. If you like, I'll let Dan Sayese go along with you as guide."

"No, thank you, Tim," laughed Connor. "If I can't find that camp after the plain directions you have furnished me with, I'll be about the last word in cheechakoes. Let's

see," he mused, "about six plus three plus another couple of miles comes to about eleven miles, or about twenty-two up and back. If I start out straight away I can easily be back to-night. And say, Tim, I'll come and spend the night with you if I bring Charley back with me. I can't muss up Mrs. Reid's orderly establishment with a prisoner. It doesn't matter so much in a bachelor establishment," he grinned.

"Right you are. You're quite welcome."

"Thank you. And thank you for your trouble, Tim. I'll probably see you to-night, then. I'll sneak a few sandwiches and a cup of coffee out of Mrs. Reid, and then get going."

But Connor was unsuccessful in his quest for sandwiches.

"Nothing doing!" declared Mrs. Reid firmly and slangily, when Connor had diffidently formulated his request. "You will have a proper meal before you start. Just go back in and sit down for ten minutes, and I'll have a moose steak and some fried potatoes ready for you."

Connor's feeble protest was promptly and energetically overruled, and in the end he capitulated, inwardly feeling extremely pleased.

Half an hour later Connor was on his way. The Reid youngsters considered him somewhat of a fraud and traitor, and said so, but the corporal pacified them by promising to tell a heap of stories when he returned.

The two boys confidently expected a continuation of their entertainment that afternoon, but though they kept keen watch for the corporal's return, they were doomed to disappointment. When bed-time came Connor was still missing, and their remarks to their mother on that score were somewhat bitter and to the point.

"Funny the corporal hasn't returned yet," remarked Mrs. Reid that evening when her husband came up from his office.

"He may have gone straight over to Tim's place. He said he would, if he brought Charley Crow in."

"But his bedding and kit are still here," said Mrs. Reid. "I should think he would have called for his stuff before he went across to Tim's."

"Well, he has probably not returned yet," observed Reid without much interest. "Most likely Charley was out on his trap-line or somewhere when Connor got to his camp, and then he'd have to wait for him. I guess he'll be back some time to-night. Or perhaps he has gone over to Tim's after all, and will call for his stuff after supper."

Later that evening Tim Malone came over to ask if Connor had returned empty-handed since he had not turned up at his place. When he heard that the corporal had not yet returned, he was inclined to agree with Reid's theory for the delay.

"He must have found some trace of Charley, or else he would have been back here long before now," he said. "He'll probably turn up sometime during the night."

"Perhaps he has got lost somewhere in the woods," suggested Mrs. Reid.

Her husband and his colleague were rude enough to laugh loudly and openly at the remark.

"But, my dear girl," expostulated Reid patronizingly, "Connor is no cheechako. He is as much at home in the woods as any white man up here. And besides, dear, even if he was the biggest fool in creation, he could easily follow his own sleigh-tracks back."

"Of course," admitted Mrs. Reid, joining in the laugh on herself, "I suppose you lords of creation are right, and that the corporal will return sometime to-night."

"He will, if Charley hasn't seen him coming, and has lit out, with Connor streaking after him," hinted Malone.

"Without his bedding?"

"Oh, a little thing like that wouldn't hold Connor back. He has got his caribou-coat, his grub-box, and plenty of matches. And a fellow can travel a long way on that in the woods. And I don't think Connor would

think twice about commandeering a few blankets from the first shack he got to, if they had any to spare," grinned Tim. "Don't you worry about Connor, Mrs. Reid. The trouble with you is, that you have got so into the habit of helping people that you want to make a lame duck out of everybody. And Connor is no lame duck; take it from me."

"I don't quite know whether to take your remark as a compliment or the opposite, Tim," laughed Mrs. Reid.

"A compliment, of course!" asserted Tim firmly. He looked almost shocked that Mrs. Reid could even hint at an alternative. "You know that I'd never dream of paying you anything but compliments."

"And right in front of the poor, down-trodden husband this brisk exchange of tender passages," confided Reid to the world in general. "However, to change this embarrassing theme, I agree with Tim. Worrying about a chap like Connor would be a waste of time, almost an insult to him. He's as tough as hickory."

But in spite of her husband's and Tim's assurance Mrs. Reid could not rid herself of a feeling of anxiety. She knew that Connor and his comrades in the police were about the last word in recklessness, but even so, she could not quite imagine Connor setting out on a long chase in the middle of the winter without his blankets and personal kit. She chided herself for being foolish, but when there were no news about the absentee at noon on the following day, she went straight to her husband's office.

"I don't like the corporal's continued absence, Johnny," she said. "I wish you would try and find out something about him."

"But, my dear," protested Reid, "he may be over at Tim's. Perhaps he turned up very late last night, and is making up for lost sleep."

"Perhaps. But if that were the case, Tim would surely have sent word over this morning. At least, I wish you would send somebody over to find out."

"I'll tell you what, dear. I'll go myself. I feel a little exercise would do me good," said Reid with a smile. "I'll have one of the boys hitch up the dogs at once."

"I thought you said exercise," murmured his wife with a provoking smile.

"Well, and isn't it exercise, climbing in and out of a dog-sleigh?" indignantly demanded Reid as he walked over to the door on his way to the store to issue his orders.

But Connor had not arrived at Tim's place.

"Dash it, Tim, I have to do something about this. My wife is beginning to worry her head off," explained Reid. "I've better take one of my boys with me, and go up to Charley's camp and see if I can find any trace of Connor. Of course, I don't see any cause for worrying myself, but you know what women are like," he ended apologetically.

"I'll go," corrected Tim. "If you go your wife would perhaps begin to worry about you too. I'll take Dan Sayese along, and we'll soon find out where Connor has chased off to. Personally, I think Charley has gone on the dodge, and that Connor has streaked after him. I must confess that I'm not more worried over Connor than you are, but I don't like to see Mrs. Reid feeling uneasy when it can be easily avoided."

"Thank you very much, Tim. And under the circumstances I'll try not to slip anything over on you while you are away, seeing you are working in a good cause," grinned Reid. "Though I'll get even with you for those silver foxes yet, and don't you forget it!"

"Oh, go and chase yourself!" was Tim's laughing and polite advice as he walked off to find Dan.

He felt a little self-conscious and foolish when he told Dan Sayese to hitch up the dogs and follow him out to Charley Crow's camp to see what had happened to Corporal Connor. But whatever Dan felt at the extraordinary request of going looking for a police-corporal with a well-established reputation for being able to look after himself,

he kept strictly to himself. He was a man who very seldom let his face betray what he felt or thought.

They were soon driving their dog-team along the trail, Tim Malone sitting in comfort in the sleigh while Dan ran behind, urging the dogs on at top speed.

They eventually arrived at the muskeg, where the trail branched off to Charley's camp, and they stopped the team.

Dan carefully examined the trail for a few moments.

"Dog-team drive in here yest'day," he announced. "Tracks no more'n twenty-four hours ol'. Nobody come back since den."

"Looks as if I was right, and that Charley has cleared out with Connor trailing him," muttered Malone. "However, let's get along to the camp and see what we can find out there from the tracks."

They crossed to the north end of the swamp, and continued along the creek. Malone was now running behind the sleigh with Dan. The trail was not very firm here, so it would have been an undue strain on the dogs for anybody to ride in the sleigh.

Finally they rounded a thicket of brush and they both stopped dead, staring. In the clearing which lay before them was no trapper's shack. The level expanse of snow was unbroken, except for a confusion of tracks, and a black patch some hundred yards in front of them, from which stuck up some charred ends of what had once been logs.

"Holy smokes!" burst from Malone. "The shack's burnt down."

"Sure," agreed Dan Sayese.

"Now I wonder——" began Malone, but he broke quickly off, and started sniffing the air instead.

"Smells as if the fire has been quite recent," he remarked.

"Sure does."

"Well, come along, Dan. Let's go and have a look at the ruins."

They left the dogs where they were and walked across the clearing. The snow was well trampled and proved that the camp had been occupied for quite some time since the last snowfall.

As they neared the blackened site of the burnt-out shack the pungent, acrid odour of burnt wood and refuse grew steadily stronger.

"Stinks like an incinerator," observed Malone. "I wonder what has happened around here?"

But Dan shook his head and could offer no suggestion.

When they had got right up to the charred debris, Dan bent down and put one hand on top of the layer of ashes and burnt wood.

"Still quite warm," he grunted. "Mus' 'ave burnt some time yes'day."

"Looks that way," agreed Malone. "But how? And most particularly, why? Connor won't have put fire to the sheebang, so it stands to reason that somebody else must have been here who put fire to the shack for some reason or other before he lit out. And that somebody most likely was Charley Crow. He must have seen the corporal coming, and then promptly fled after first setting fire to the shack. But why he should do that beats me hollow. However, no use guessing about that. Let's have a look round and see where they have chased off to."

Dan, who was an experienced tracker, carefully and methodically examined the several trails which led from the clearing into the surrounding woods.

"This mus' be it," he announced presently, bending low over a sleigh-track which pointed about due north. "This made by loaded sleighs, an' made yes'day or las' night. This only fresh track made by loaded sleighs."

"Well, let's get our own dogs and follow that trail," ordered Malone.

But Dan apparently was not listening. He stood frowning thoughtfully down at the trail.

"Dam' funny, this," he said presently. "No moc'sin tracks on trail. If corporal chasin' Charley or som'budy, his tracks would show on trail behin' sleigh."

"Never mind that," exclaimed Malone impatiently. "Perhaps he went scouting up the trail ahead, and had his dogs following him. He may have suspected an ambush or something. Now you go ahead, Dan, and I'll follow along with the dogs."

Dan started ahead up the fairly firm trail while Malone fetched their dog-train and trailed after him.

But their trailing proved disappointing. About three miles up, the track they had been following swung on to a hard-packed, well-trafficked trail, leading in to some rat-swamps farther east.

"They gone west," announced Dan when Malone got up to him. "Nobody use this trail since they pass, so I can see plain how they turn. They gone on to main trail few miles west."

"I wonder where they have headed for?" mused Malone aloud.

"Mos' anywhere," was Dan's comprehensive answer. "The fellar corporal chasin' sure to follow trails where runnin' is good. So he jus' follow beaten trails where impossible track him. An' I guess him travellin' full speed, too."

"I'm right with you there," grinned Malone. "Bet he's going like a streak of greased lightning. And it's no use for us to try follow them up. They have got too long a start, and are travelling too fast. So we've better get back home and report that the merry chase is going full out. Which is the shortest way back? Going around by the main trail, or the way we came in?"

"Goin' back the way we came shortest," announced Dan.

"All right. We'll return that way then."

They turned the dogs round, and started them down the trail. When they were once more back in the clearing

where Charley Crow's shack had recently stood, Malone halted the dogs.

"Let's go and have another look at those ruins," he suggested, starting across, followed by Dan. "Now, I wonder what sound, sane reason there was for that loon to put fire to his shack?" did Malone voice his speculations. "Perhaps it was only an accident," he answered his own query.

Dan had been standing beside him looking searchingly and curiously over the chaos of charred logs and ashes. Suddenly he bent forward, and stared fixedly at a spot some yards in front of them near the twisted, cracked remains of a small cooking range. Without a word he stepped quickly forward, bent down, and moved aside a blackened log.

Malone, who had watched him curiously, saw him recoil, an expression of horror on his face. In a few strides he was beside Dan, and what he saw when he looked down made him feel sick, shaken and dizzy.

CHAPTER VII

INSPECTOR WESTON IS MOBILIZED

INSPECTOR RICHARD WESTON, R.N.W.M.P., was sitting before his desk in the office at the Barracks in Portage Bend, feeling disgusted with life in general.

Only a little over three years ago the parson down in Toronto had declared him and Betty Elliott man and wife, one and inseparable, until death, etc., and now Betty had left him.

True, it had been imperative for Betty to go away, and she had gone in a good cause, but even so . . .

Last spring their one and only child, Richard junior, a boy about two years old, had contracted a bad case of bronchitis. They had hoped that the summer would rid him of all consequences of the attack, but the illness had proved very tenacious.

When fall came he developed a nasty cough, and the doctor at once declared that the boy had to be taken south to a more clement climate for the winter, as the severe northern cold would have disastrous, perhaps fatal, consequences for the boy.

With a heavy heart, but with his usual energy, Weston at once set about making the necessary arrangements, and for once he was supremely thankful for his independent financial position. It was decided that Betty was to take the boy to Southern California for the winter, and it was arranged that her mother should go with them.

Weston travelled with them as far as Toronto. He was

smiling and cheerful as usual, and brazenly told his wife that it would be quite a refreshing experience to be a bachelor again for five or six months, and Betty answered in the same strain.

When the train at last pulled out from Central Station, Weston felt extremely foolish, and had to strive hard to hide the fact from Betty's father, who did not look particularly cheerful himself. And all the way back to Portage Bend on the train Weston had felt particularly annoyed because the carriage wheels seemed to repeat, over and over again: "Five months, perhaps six! Five months, perhaps six!" with mocking, persistent and irritating regularity.

Back in Portage Bend he felt at loose ends, and never knew what to do with himself, though his many friends were very generous in their efforts to entertain and cheer him up.

During these days Weston often wished he was back in his days of minor responsibilities, when he was a constable and non-com. There was always such a lot of action for those fellows. Patrols here, and patrols there. But now, as the presiding genius of the detachment, his task was confined to organizing and administrating. He had to stick around the office almost all the time, where he could keep all the threads in his hand, and patrols had grown a rare luxury for him.

Of course, Betty wrote to him at least three times a week, and often more frequently, and she reported that the boy was improving wonderfully, but even so . . .

On this morning work in the office was very slack, and as usual when work was slack, Weston was brooding deeply on his pet subject.

Suddenly the telephone bell shrilled, and in a detached way Weston watched Sergeant Stewart lift the receiver off the hook. Sergeant Stewart had relieved Sergeant Wilson a year ago.

"Hallo! . . . Yes. One moment. Headquarters, Prince Albert, wants to speak to you, sir," announced the sergeant.

Without enthusiasm Weston reached for the instrument on his desk. Probably that ass Woof, he told himself, wanting to complain about the spelling in some voucher, or some such rot. Candidly, Weston had regarded it somewhat in the line of a curse when the detachment under his command had been connected up with Headquarters through the long distance telephone a year ago. It had brought Headquarters too close. And like all spirited members of any service Weston considered Headquarters something of a trial which was hard to bear at times.

"Hallo!" he called in a bored voice. "Yes. Inspector Weston speaking. Oh! How are you, sir." Weston's voice had grown quite jovial, and a smile had begun to spread over his face. It was his old friend Superintendent Trench speaking. "How is everything down there?"

"Everything is hell just at present," was the prompt answer. "Connor has been killed."

"What!" exclaimed Weston, sitting up straight. "Do you mean our Connor? The Connor who was up here with us when you were in command, I mean?"

"That's whom I do mean."

"Good Lord! How did it happen? Accident?"

"No. Murdered!" answered the superintendent explosively.

"Good Lord!" repeated Weston, who could think of no better expression just then. "Who did it?"

"We don't know for certain, but we have strong suspicions. Here are the facts."

The superintendent gave a brief account of Brandon's murder, their inquiries in that connection, and how these inquiries had sent Connor off to hunt for Charley Crow. Then he related how Malone had come to go out to Charley's trapping camp, and the latter's observations out there.

"As Malone and the half-breed who was with him were looking the ruins over on their way back home," continued

Superintendent Trench, "the half-breed discovered something that looked like a human leg sticking out from under a burnt log. He went over and removed the log, and underneath he found the charred remains of a human body. It was burnt past recognition, of course, but poking around among the ashes near the body, Malone and the half-breed found a police tunic-button. Badly oxidized, but the coat-of-arms could still be recognized."

"Good Lord! And that was Connor's body?" burst from Weston, who had listened intently to the superintendent's story.

"Quite," was the grave answer. "But to continue with my story. After Malone and the chap with him had made that discovery, they wisely decided not to poke around any more, but to leave the further investigation in our hands. They arranged everything as they had found it, and covered the body up with spruce-boughs. They put some heavy logs on top to prevent any animal from messing about.

"Then Malone went straight back to Lac la Ronge, borrowed a fresh dog-team from the Hudson's Bay chap, and started post-haste for here. He made a non-stop trip in. Both he and his dogs were about all in when they arrived here. That was a week ago. As soon as we had heard his story I sent Sergeant Belcher and two constables up to Lac la Ronge to look into things. And they found several things of interest in the ruins of that shack, besides what Malone had already found. One of the constables brought in Connor's remains yesterday, and he brought with him Belcher's preliminary report.

"Amongst other things they found the charred bones of five dogs. In all probability what's left of Connor's team. The wily murderer probably first killed Connor and his dogs, then placed them all in the shack, and finally put fire to the whole lot to cover up all traces of his crime. And the whole affair would in all probability have remained a mystery for a long time if Mrs. Reid hadn't grown uneasy. Even after Connor had eventually been reported missing

nobody would hardly have thought of digging around in that camp after everything had been covered up at the first snowfall."

"But are you sure, sir, that it was actually Connor's remains they found?" asked Weston. "And how do you know it was a case of murder? It might have been an accident."

"There is no doubt about the body being Connor's," answered the superintendent. "Belcher and his lads found the rest of the buttons near the corpse, and also Connor's revolver. His rifle was also found in the debris. Besides, an autopsy was held on the body last night, and it was identified as Connor's by the teeth. The identification was made by Connor's dentist here. The poor chap nearly fainted, and I don't blame him. It was a ghastly experience. Nor is there any mystery as to the manner of his death. The doctors who carried out the post-mortem examination found that Connor had been killed by a rifle bullet through his head. The bullet had entered the back of his skull, they maintained. That seems to prove that Connor was taken by surprise, and that he was shot down from behind. It's a plain case of murder right enough."

Weston smothered a curse, and his face hardened.

"And is there any proof that this man Charley Crow is the murderer?" he asked.

"No. No proof. But you can easily see for yourself that circumstantial evidence decidedly points his way as the murderer of both Brandon and Connor. Sergeant Belcher reported that he had an interview with the Indian chief up there, and he got some interesting facts about Charley Crow. The chief described him as generally shifty and untrustworthy. He had been strongly suspected of rifling traps on several occasions, though they had never been able to prove anything against him. Nobody had heard that he had returned to Lac la Ronge after he had gone to Prince Albert, but on the other hand the chief was quite positive that nobody else had occupied Charley's trapping

camp. So it looks as if this man, Charley Crow, has slipped quietly up to his camp without advertising his presence for reasons of his own. And now he has disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed him up. And we want a chat with that gentleman very urgently.

"Now, according to the tracks found up and around that camp, the man who killed Connor fled northwards. The chief told Belcher that two years ago Charley Crow was up somewhere around Beaver Lake during the trapping season. If Charley Crow is the guilty man, therefore, there is every possibility that he has gone up to Beaver Lake, where he knows the country, to hide out somewhere in the hills there."

"He couldn't find a better locality in which to hide," muttered Weston.

"I quite agree with you. Now here is the position. By to-morrow every trail into the north will be patrolled, so if our man is anywhere up there he won't be able to get out. By to-morrow's train your old friend Sergeant Wilson will arrive at your place, accompanied by two constables. They are going up to Fort Churchill, in case that fellow turns east and tries to get out that way. Besides carrying out investigations of his own, Wilson will warn our chaps up at Churchill, so they can get busy around their district. You'll have to arrange for guides and dogs for Wilson's patrol. If our man keeps on the move, he'll bump into somebody pretty soon, but if he has holed up somewhere around Beaver Lake it will be a stiff job to dig him out. It will take an experienced man who knows the country well."

"I'll go, sir," said Weston promptly and eagerly.

A chuckle came over the wire.

"What's the joke, sir?" asked Weston in innocent surprise.

"Well, I really had reserved that job for you," came the mirthful answer, "but I had a quiet bet with myself that as soon as you heard about this business, you'd

volunteer like a shot, before I had a chance to express my wishes in the matter."

"Well, it didn't require any sixth sense to guess that," said Weston with righteous indignation. "Dash it, sir, when a fellow openly defies the police, we simply have to go full out, all of us, just to prove that a thing like that is simply not done. We can't have anybody rock at our prestige or we might as well pack up at once. And with Connor's murder crammed into this business, it makes it more or less a personal affair with me."

"Quite, quite," agreed the superintendent. "But that was not exactly the foundation for my bet. I knew you would feel so forlorn and forsaken by now that you would simply snatch at any chance that gave any promise of excitement. Deserted husband taking the long trail, and all that, you know."

"Forlorn and forsaken! Deserted husband!" snorted Weston with dignified contempt. "You don't for one moment think, sir, that I'm walking around like a sick calf just because Betty and the kid are away for a few months, do you?"

"Oh, not at all," answered the superintendent pleasantly. "I fully expect you to kneel down by your bed every morning and night to give great praise to Allah because you are a bachelor once more."

Weston bridled at the words. He felt scandalized at the broad note of sarcasm in his superior's voice, and he strove manfully to find a snappy and dignified answer, but the superintendent spoiled his chances by continuing:

"By the way, my wife had a letter from Betty the other day, and we were both glad to see that the boy is getting on famously. Betty and little Dick are coming here for a week's or fortnight's visit as soon as they return."

"They are not!" retorted Weston firmly.

"Oh, yes, but they are. Because just about that time you'll take your leave, go down to Toronto to fetch them,

and then the whole party is to proceed straight up here. My wife has arranged everything already."

"Oh, well, in that case, of course," observed the mollified Weston with a grin. "But to return to this business. Have you any further information to give me?"

"No, but Sergeant Wilson is bringing along a full report on the case. You'll get all the facts from that as we know them. There are quite a few details which you will find of interest, and which should be helpful in your investigations."

"Very well, sir. I shall make all arrangements so that I can pull out early in the morning day after to-morrow."

"Good. I shall instruct all patrols to forward any information they may pick up to you at Beaver Narrows. Sergeant Belcher is pushing his inquiries around Lac la Ronge, and will continue gradually northwards to Beaver Narrows. I'm sending up word to him to get in touch with you there."

"Very good. And another thing, sir," continued Weston a little apologetically, "please tell Mrs. Trench that when she writes to Betty she's just to tell her that I have gone out on an ordinary patrol. This Mr. Charley Crow sounds a rather tough, cantankerous customer, so Betty might commence worrying if she knows I'm going after him."

"My dear fellow! Do you think we are quite idiots here?" asked Superintendent Trench in an injured voice. "Of course we won't mention why you are going."

"No, I far from think you are idiots, but I only want to guard against accidents," explained Weston with a laugh. "Well, sir, I'll get busy at once."

"Right. Good-bye, and good luck, old man."

"Good-bye, sir, and please give my best to Mrs. Trench."

For a while after he had rung off, Weston sat buried in deep thought.

So Connor was gone; cheery, light-hearted Connor.

The best of comrades, and an interested, fearless, and highly efficient policeman. And then passing out in such an unromantic manner. Evidently being shot down from behind like a dog, probably without having been given the slightest chance to defend himself, so he at least could have gone down in a burst of glory.

Weston wondered how Connor had been killed, what had actually taken place up at that trapping-camp. If the medicals were right, it was obvious that he had been caught napping, but that was rather unlike Connor. However, no use theorizing over that now, decided Weston. Whatever had happened, he would do his level best to bring about that Connor was fitly avenged.

But before any fit punishment could be meted out the miscreant had to be found and apprehended. And just at present he was at large, very much at large.

Weston pondered the situation deeply.

He was inclined to think that the murderer had gone into hiding somewhere. If he moved around he would have to follow certain strictly defined paths, and sooner or later he would be seen by somebody. And if it got rumoured abroad that a stranger had been discovered travelling around in any locality, one of the patrols that would be scouring the country would soon be swooping down on him, and have him give an account of himself.

Now, if Headquarters were right in their theory, and the murderer was Charley Crow, he would know all about that. Consequently he would choose to lie low somewhere. And Weston was strongly inclined to think that he had sought sanctuary somewhere in the Beaver Lake district. In the first place, as Superintendent Trench had already pointed out, Charley had been trapping up in that part of the country and knew his way about, and, secondly, that particular region, with its maze of hills, ridges, valleys, draws and ravines, would offer excellent facilities for a man who wanted to lead a retired and unobtrusive existence, out of range of the public eye.

But to find a man up in that vast district, a man who was firmly determined not to be found, would be a rather formidable task. Something like looking for a needle in a haystack. Weston knew the country up there better than most, and when he reviewed the contract ahead of him, he scratched his head in perplexity. However, he decided, with patience, perseverance, and through unremitting vigilance, one should be able to get somewhere in time. But before he was actually on the ground and had got some information about Charley's past activities, and some idea as to his pet haunts and former cronies, it would be futile to start forming any plans. But what he could do was to seek the counsel of one who knew that country and the people of the north even better than he did himself, and hear if he had any suggestion to offer.

"Oh, Sergeant," he called. And Sergeant Stewart rapidly walked across the office, all ears. "I'm going up to Beaver Narrows day after to-morrow. I'm taking one of the constables along. But before I explain the whole business to you, I want you to send one of the lads across the river for Angus Mackenzie. He is to tell Angus I want to see him as soon as possible."

"Very good, sir." And the sergeant disappeared.

When he returned, Weston told him to draw up a chair, and he then poured into the sergeant's avid ears the story of the outrages at Prince Albert and Lac la Ronge.

"Now, Sergeant," he continued, when the tale was told, "I'm leaving at daybreak day after to-morrow. I'm taking Constable Mason along. You'll have to get busy at once, arranging for guides, sleighs and dogs for Wilson's patrol. He and his chaps will be in on to-morrow's train. While I'm away you'll have to keep a sharp look-out. Arrange to have the arrival of any strange Indian reported at once; and, before all, watch every outbound train carefully. We want this man Charley Crow badly. Even if he's not the murderer he's in this business somewhere, or else he wouldn't have played the disappearing act so

completely. But personally I think he has holed up somewhere, most likely in the Beaver Lake district, like I told you. Is Mason around the Barracks?"

"Yessir. He's constable-on-duty to-day."

"Good. Please send him in to me, and arrange for one of the other lads to take over his duties."

Sergeant Stewart walked along the corridor to the front office, where the constable-on-duty sat in bored solitude, doing nothing, because there was nothing for him to do.

"The inspector wants to see you at once, Mason," announced the sergeant.

"What's up?" asked Mason, jumping to his feet, his lassitude a thing of the past. There was some apprehension in his voice.

"You'll soon find out, my lad," answered the sergeant compassionately, slipping a touch of manly sorrow and commiseration into his voice. "But this much I can tell you, I shouldn't like to be in your shoes for anything just now."

Mason quickly walked along to the office, filled with misgivings. Up to that moment he had thought his conscience peculiarly clear, but evidently there were things in his past which he had overlooked or forgotten. And he far from relished the impending interview. Inspector Weston was the most considerate and understanding of superiors, and he never punished excessively; but, on the other hand, he never failed to administer rebuke where rebuke was due. And though his rebukes were short and to the point, without any unnecessary frills, they nevertheless had the effect on the unfortunate victim that it was impossible for his comrades to get a civil answer out of him for the rest of that day, at least.

"Oh, there you are, Mason," exclaimed the inspector when the apprehensive constable appeared. "You are to go out on patrol with me day after to-morrow."

In his relief Mason very nearly outraged all principles

of etiquette by cheering aloud. But by an almost super-human effort he managed to suppress his wild impulse.

"Very good, sir," he managed to say, trying to sound casual and business-like.

Weston next gave him a brief outline of the case.

"Now, Mason, you'll go straight ahead and look after all preparations for our trip," he went on. "The sergeant has arranged for somebody to take over your duties. We are taking one sleigh and five dogs. Give the dogs double rations to-day and to-morrow. I'll make out a list of the provisions and equipment we require. The list will be ready for you in half an hour's time or so. We are pulling out at seven in the morning. I'll have my bedding and kit brought down here to-morrow afternoon, and I'll join you here when we pull out. All clear?"

"Yessir. Perfectly, sir."

"Good. Then go ahead and pick out five good dogs."

The constable withdrew, joy in his heart. Sergeant Stewart had returned to his desk, and the jubilant Mason, quite regardless of future consequences, favoured the former with a deep, impudent wink in passing. The sergeant was so utterly taken aback at the outrage that he even forgot to frown down his subordinate's misplaced and irreverent flippancy before the latter had disappeared from view.

When Weston was about half-way through his indent for Mason, a short, bow-legged half-breed entered the office, though nobody unacquainted with his true racial standing would have taken him for anything but a full-blooded Indian.

"Hello, Wess! Hello, Sergeant!" he greeted unceremoniously, a broad smile on his swarthy face.

Weston looked up at the intruder.

"Oh, hello, Angus, old fellow," he cried cordially. "Come and sit down. I want to pow-wow with you presently. I'll just finish what I'm working at. I won't be a minute."

Angus discarded his caribou-coat, chucked it across a chair, seated himself on another, and beamed paternally on the hard-working inspector.

Outwardly Weston's old friend and almost inseparable companion on numerous trips and patrols had not changed much during the six years which had passed since Weston had first met him, shortly after the former's first appearance at Portage Bend as a corporal. But after Weston's marriage Angus's scheme of life underwent a radical change. On the principle that what his idol did was a thing quite worthy of imitation, Angus had promptly begun to look around for a suitable wife for himself, and his quest had been crowned with success. And having secured a wife, he decided that he had to abandon his old life of careless irresponsibility and settle down to some fixed occupation. Possessing brains and initiative, he opened a store in a small way across the river near the Indian Reserve, and he had made quite a success out of his venture.

By the time Weston had become the proud father of a boy, Angus knew that there would be an increase in the Mackenzie family in a not distant future, and he found that everything was as it should be.

But on the day when he had become the head of a family, Angus strode along to the Weston domicile, a deep frown of perplexity on his face. He was of the opinion that his wife had been overdoing things a bit, inasmuch as she had presented him with twins, a boy and a girl. Personally, Angus was inclined to view the matter as bordering on the presumptuous and tactless side. It might appear as if his wife had been endeavouring to go the Westons one better, and he wondered with considerable trepidation and misgiving how Westons would take the news. Of course, he argued earnestly to himself, the whole matter had been a pure accident, quite outside his control, so he hoped that Westons would overlook his lapse, or at least view it with lenience and indulgence.

But Angus did not like the situation. He did not like the situation at all!

At last he arrived at the Weston bungalow, and he began apologetically to stammer out his shameful confession to the inspector and his wife.

Weston and Betty promptly, and with becoming gravity, assuaged his fears. They assured him that there was not the slightest cause for him to apologize. They even told him, to his great surprise and delight, that they were both pleased on his behalf, and that he and his wife ought to be very proud indeed. Then a ton of care had promptly lifted from Angus's heart, and he left the house feeling like one of the lords of creation.

Of course the boy was in due course christened Richard Weston Mackenzie, while the girl was given the baptismal names of Betty Elliott Weston Mackenzie. Angus was very thorough in his methods, and wanted to have everything quite in order and correct.

Since Betty Weston had gone to California Angus had turned up as regularly as a clockwork at Weston's bungalow every night to ask for news of the absentees, and to smoke a pipe with "Wess."

At last Weston had finished his indent.

"Sergeant," he said, "please give this list to Mason, and tell him to get everything collected. I'll check everything with him to-morrow."

The sergeant took the list and departed, returning a few minutes later.

"Now, Angus," began Weston, "I want your advice. But first I must tell you all about things." He rapidly sketched past events for Angus, but when he got as far as to the murder of Corporal Connor he had to interrupt his narrative for a few moments to give Angus a chance to blow off some high-pressure steam. Connor had also been a friend of Angus's. Angus's control of the English language was considerably faulty, but in spite of that handicap he managed to express himself in a way which

quite won him Sergeant Stewart's respect. And as the sergeant could rise to quite lofty heights himself in crowded moments, he was no mean judge.

As soon as Angus's high-pressure was once more reduced to normal, Weston continued his story, and finished up by informing Angus of the hypothesis about the fugitive's present whereabouts.

"Yes. Guess that right, Wess," nodded Angus his endorsement. "Fellow sure to hole up. Would be lunaticky for him to run about country for all to see. An' Beaver Lake district dam' fine place for hidin'."

"Do you know this fellow Charley Crow at all, Angus?"

"No," regretted Angus. "I don't know many o' them Injuns down at Lac la Ronge. They not come down here much. An' I never hear 'bout that fella Charley Crow."

"Can you think of any place where a fellow would be likely to hide up Beaver Lake way?" continued Weston.

"No. I don't know more'n you do 'bout that," answered Angus, still more apologetically. "You know yourself, hundreds an' more good places for fella to hide up there. Beaver Lake district just good, fine place for that. But we won't be able to guess nothin' where he is till we get up there an' fin' out who his frien's was when him there before."

"We?" asked Weston, staring. "You aren't coming, Angus."

Angus grinned.

"'Course I am, Wess," he remarked. "Don't be dam'd fool." Which sententious sentence nearly made poor Sergeant Stewart burst a blood-vessel in his effort to retain decorum.

"But listen to reason, Angus," pleaded Weston. "What is going to happen to your business if you go away? And what will your wife say?"

"Business is all right," answered Angus complacently. "My wife's brother, who's helpin' me, will look after it

all right. Him quite good, bright fella. An' my wife will say: 'Angus, you did quite right. If you not gone with Wess, me break somethin' on your head.' That's what wife'll say. I know. So I go."

"But my dear chap," expostulated Weston, "I can't possibly drag you away from home and business like this. It wouldn't be fair to anybody. You know, I should be glad to have you along, but really, old man, it won't do at all."

"Listen, Wess," said Angus imperturbably. "You'll need me up there for sure, sometime. I know lot's o' fellers up there, an' can fin' out things better'n you. They talk to me where afraid to talk to you. An' if you say: 'No! I chase along after you, anyhow.'"

Weston looked at Angus in quizzical despair. He knew that Angus had been perfectly right in what he had just said. And there was no doubt about his being a valuable addition to the expedition. There was not a better tracker in the country, and he had a keen nose for picking up useful information.

"Well," said Weston with a smile, "I know you are as stubborn as a mule, Angus, and that once you have made up your mind to go, nothing short of force or paralysis can stop you. So since you won't listen to reason, I shall have to bow to the inevitable and take you along."

"Good," grunted Angus. "I'll take my sleigh an' dogs along, so we travel light. When do we pull out?"

"Day after to-morrow, at seven in the morning. Better bring your sleigh over here to-morrow, so we can have both packed and trimmed. Oh, by the way, Sergeant. Has Mason gone down to the store with that list yet?"

"I'll see, sir." And the sergeant disappeared into the outer regions, returning almost immediately. "Sorry, sir. He left a few minutes ago. Shall I send somebody to fetch him back?"

"Never mind. Just ring up the store and ask them to tell Mason to wait till Angus gets down there. We

shall need some more grub now we are going to be three. I'll write out a supplementary list and Angus can pop into the store with it on his way home. That all right, Angus? "

"Sure," agreed Angus.

Weston quickly wrote out the list and handed it to Angus, whereupon that gentleman donned his caribou-coat, waved an airy good-bye, and strode out of the office, looking very pleased with the world and himself.

On the following day, at noon, the asthmatic old engine, hauling two day-coaches from Portage Junction, wheezed alongside Portage Bend Depot. Having come to a jerky, creaking stop, the train disgorged, among other passengers, Weston's old chum, Sergeant Wilson, and the latter's two henchmen. Weston and Wilson had not seen each other for a year, but even so no time was wasted on mutual exchanges of personal reminiscences. Weston pounced on the report Wilson handed him, while the latter at once set about completing all arrangements for a speedy departure.

Weston studied the report very carefully. As Superintendent Trench had said, there were certainly several points of great interest, and Weston nodded his head approvingly several times during the perusal.

When he had finished the study of the document, Weston had a high-speed discussion with Wilson, and after a hasty lunch the sergeant and the two constables started out on their long trek.

After the small war-party had departed, Weston and Sergeant Stewart spent a busy afternoon. There were quite a few things which had to be attended to before the inspector's departure. But at last everything was in order, the last instructions issued, and Weston started for home to pack his personal kit. He also wrote a long letter to Betty, explaining that he had to go up North to look into conditions among the people up there, and that she must not expect any letters from him for a month or two. Of course, he went on, he would send letters along with any-

body happening to go south, but it would depend wholly on chance if any opportunity offered. And he finished up by saying that he was looking forward to a nice, quiet trip, and that he was delighted to have a chance of seeing again all his old friends along the trail.

At seven o'clock sharp on the following morning the expedition started from the Barracks, and soon they were facing the snappy, icy breeze, which always in the early mornings seemed to haunt the bed of the Saskatchewan River, and the open swamps they had to cross a few miles north-west of the town. But Weston enjoyed it. He remarked to Constable Mason that it always acted on him as a tonic, a sentiment which Mason resolutely refused to endorse, seeing he had just discovered that he had frozen the tip of his nose.

Before the present patrol Mason had always prided himself on having quite passed his apprenticeship in matters pertaining to dog-trains and the winter-trail. But gradually he began to feel shaken in his conviction.

The inspector and Angus set a pace which, as time passed, began to grow quite embarrassing to the constable, while the pace-makers seemed quite fresh and untiring as mile followed mile. Mason had always been firmly convinced that every time he had been driving a dog-train he had always got every ounce of speed out of his team, but he now discovered that with the two experts doing the driving, the dogs seemed to have found some reserve fund of energy, though the two drivers never appeared to use any special coercion.

But it was when they made their first camp towards the evening that Mason really got the humiliating feeling that he was after all a mere cheechako, only a tenderfoot.

Weston and Angus set to work quickly and methodically, as if they were following a set, carefully rehearsed programme, while Mason stood somewhat helplessly by, wondering what he could do. If he made up his mind to do a thing, he generally found that one of the others

was just doing it. But Weston soon discovered the youngster's embarrassment, and came to his rescue.

"Get the dogs out of the harness, and chained up, Mason," he directed. "Then sling the harness up in a tree somewhere and go along and start rustling firewood."

And Mason fell to with alacrity, supremely thankful that he had at last found his niche in the scheme of things.

Mason later got quite a shock when he discovered that the inspector had quietly assumed the duties as cook. He found it quite improper, almost indecent, that he should lounge around doing nothing while his commanding officer was wielding the pots and pans. He did not quite relish the idea of sitting down taking his ease under the circumstances, so he stood by, looking nervously and perplexedly at the busy inspector, wondering if he should offer his services.

"Well, Mason," remarked the inspector presently, turning a smiling face to the constable. "Why don't you sit down and enjoy life till grub is ready? Are you perhaps afraid that I shall make a mess of the meal?"

"Good Lord, no, sir!" hastened Mason to assure. "I only wanted to ask you if I could give you a hand?"

"No, thank you. There is nothing for you to do but sit down and wait till grub is all ready. At least not before the dog-fish is thawed out. Then you can chuck them one a piece. But don't forget to pulverize some sulphur and sprinkle it on each fish."

"Huh! You still have him silly notion, Wess?" interposed Angus with a contemptuous snort. The "notion" which had evoked Angus's scorn was an idea of Weston's that a moderate daily dose of sulphur was very healthy for the dogs; wherein he was right. But Angus, who could be hopelessly conservative at times, had always jeered at the idea, which he put down as a mild form of lunacy. Angus argued that the Indians never used such absurd remedies, and their dogs always seemed in good form. Weston and Angus had in the past had

lengthy arguments on the subject, but Weston had refused to be talked out of his rooted conviction about the health-promoting qualities of sulphur, so he always carried a few sticks with him on every trip.

Weston's only answer to Angus's present challenge was a superior and provoking grin as he once more turned to his culinary duties, and Mason finally sat down feeling a little less uncomfortable.

After supper they smoked and chatted, and the inspector and Angus told tales about former patrols up that way to the delighted and appreciative Mason, while the flames from the roaring fire cast their fitful, flickering light around the clearing, and occasional snow-owls hooted around in the woods.

There was only one note of discord in this atmosphere of peace and harmony. Angus's dogs did not like their colleagues of the police, and said so. And the police-dogs thought it only fit and proper to answer in kind. So for a while they jointly strove valiantly to ruin the peace and quietness of the night. But gradually they began to tire of the pastime, and one after another they rolled up and dropped off to sleep. An example which their human companions followed a little later.

So they continued day after day. Mason soon got over his discomfort at having the inspector as a daily companion, a fact for which he was indebted to Weston's ready tact and natural kindliness. He began to enjoy the trip immensely, especially as his two companions initiated him into several tricks of the trail, and further gave him a lot of useful hints.

About noon of the fifth day they reached the junction of the Lac la Ronge and the Portage Bend-Beaver Narrows trail. They continued straight up the trail, determined to take their noonday meal at Charley's Place.

Charley was quite an institution in the district. For many years now he had been the culinary artist of one of the camps which the Hudson's Bay Company main-

tained along the trail as rest-camps for the teamsters and horse-teams which, during the winter, carted goods from Portage Bend for the northern posts. The horse-teams went as far as the north end of Moose Lake, a week's travel farther north, where all the goods were stored till the rivers and lakes were navigable, when they were shipped on by York-boats and canoes.

As regularly as the winter-traffic commenced, Charley trekked up to his old camp, and remained there till spring began to make the trails impassable. He was quite a character, and knew everybody frequenting that particular trail. And as that trail formed one of the main arteries to the north, his circle of acquaintances was very extensive. His surname was forgotten by most. He was universally known simply as "Charley," and the camp as "Charley's Place."

When the two dog-trains raced into the camp-square, which was formed by the surrounding bunk-houses, stables, and a store-house, Charley looked out of the window of his cook-shack with languid interest. But as soon as he had established the identity of one member of the party, he stirred into instant action. He hurried to the door and opened it, heedless of the cold which swirled into his warm kitchen like streamers of white vapour.

"Hullo! Hullo, Captain!" he shouted, beaming all over his face. Charley preferred the military touch when addressing officers of the police. "Gosh! This is some surprise seein' you up this way. It ain't like the ol' times no more, when you uster come roun' steady-like every winter. But come right in. An', gosh! if there ain't ol' Angus, too. Hullo, you ol' pirate! Just like ol' times seein' you two on the trail. An' I'm glad to see you, too, Mason," he added handsomely, "though it ain't so long since I saw you. But come right in, all o' you. I'll get busy and rustle you up a meal what is a meal."

The sleighs were run behind the cook-shack wall, and the three travellers entered the shack. After a round of hand-shaking and further expressions of pleasure from Charley, the three pilgrims seated themselves while Charley got busy around his cooking-range.

"On the war-path, Captain?" asked Charley casually after a tactful interval of silence.

"Well, yes, more or less," smiled Weston.

"Say, some funny rumours drifted up here t'other day," continued Charley. "Some prospector fellow, who came from Prince Albert, passed through, an' he tol' me that some guy in a lumber-camp near town had been shot dead by some other guy. An' he went on to say that, passin' through Lac la Ronge, somebody had tol' him that one o' your boys had been killed by some Injun down there. The body was foun' in a burnt-out shack, he said. That right?"

Charley hid his bubbling curiosity behind a stern mask of indifference.

"Well, yes," admitted Weston. "I'll tell you all about it, Charley. Only, I want you to understand that just at present I don't want you to let the story go any farther."

"You know you can trust me, Captain," said Charley, a shade of reproach in his voice.

"Yes, I do. Or else I should have told you nothing," grinned Weston. "Well, this is what happened."

He gave a précis of past events as he knew them, while Charley drank in the story avidly, his cooking for the moment suspended.

"An' who was the police-boy who was killed? Do I know him?" asked Charley when Weston had finished.

"Yes. You knew him rather well. It was Connor."

"What!" shouted Charley. "You mean it was my ol' frien' Connor who was done in in this dirty manner?"

"It was."

For a moment Charley stared speechlessly at Weston, but suddenly he found his voice, and for a few snappy minutes he gave his imagination and vocabulary free reins.

"An' who was the dam'd skunk who done it?" he asked, when his language was once more fit for publication.

"We don't know yet," answered Weston, "but we have strong suspicions. Do you know an Indian down from Lac la Ronge called Charley Crow?"

"You suspicion he done it?"

"We don't know, but we think he may have had something to do with it. Do you know him?"

"Lemme see. I seem to have heard that monicker somewhere," mused Charley. He looked towards the ceiling for an inspiration, and miraculously found it. "I remember now," he cried triumphantly. "There was a fellow called Charley Crow who was trappin' up Beaver Lake way coupla seasons ago. I heard he was suspicioned o' bein' a fur-thief. That the guy you mean?"

"Yes. That's the fellow. Now we have reasons to believe that he's gone up towards Beaver Lake. Have you heard of anyone who's seen him up that way, or who has passed him on the trail?"

"Nope. I've heard nothin a-tall," answered Charley apologetically. "I haven't heard nothin' o' that guy since he was up here that time." He turned to the cooking-range and once more took up his interrupted duties, frowning thoughtfully down at the pans. Suddenly he wheeled round. "Say!" he exclaimed eagerly, "I don't know, but this may have somethin' to do with this fellow. A matter o' a fortnight ago or so, there was some talk about a fellow, drivin' a dog-team, who'd been chasin' along northward on the trail nights. Several fellows had seen the team go past their camps. Them who noticed it said he had no bells on his dogs, an' that he was pushin' ahead at a nifty clip. An' he

never stopped anywhere, even when they called out to him. So nobody knows who he was. But it may only have been a guy in a hurry, o' course, an' has nothin' to do with that fellow, perhaps. Though it fits in with the time he would 'a' passed if he had headed this way."

"Humph," grunted Weston reflectively. "Do you remember if there was any moon at that time?"

Charley went into silent consultation with himself for some moments.

"Nope," he said at last, having disentangled himself from his profound reflections. "It must 'a' been aroun' the time o' the new moon."

"Might have been our missing friend," commented Weston thoughtfully. "A fellow in a hurry wouldn't have travelled along the dark trail at night when he could have travelled much faster in the daytime—except he had some special reason for it. So it looks as if yon mysterious warrior might have been a chap who did not want to be recognized. Yes. It might have been our man. But even if it was it doesn't help us much, as we don't know where he stopped. You have heard nothing else?"

Charley twisted his eyes towards the ceiling for a fresh inspiration, but this time he drew a blank.

"No-o-pe," he confessed finally with some reluctance. "Nothin' else a-tall."

"Oh, well," sighed Weston. "We'll have to work on what we have got, then, which isn't very much," he added with a grin. "However, we may hear something up around Beaver Narrows."

In a little while Charley placed enamelled plates and mugs, as well as forks and knives, on the table, and soon the travellers could attack with relish the meal "what was a meal." There were juicy moose steaks, generous slices of fried bacon, potatoes, fresh soda-biscuits, butter, a diversity of jams, and plenty of strong, excellent coffee; in short, everything to tickle the palate of a hungry wayfarer and fill him with benevolence towards all

mankind. They all praised Charley's genius. Not so much in words, perhaps, their mouths were too busy for that; but their earnest application spoke for them.

At last they had to give up in spite of Charley's hearty encouragements. They pushed back from the table, filled and lighted their pipes, and soon they were puffing contentedly, while they endeavoured to the best of their ability to satisfy Charley's raging thirst for news about everybody and everything "outside."

But presently Weston knocked out his pipe and announced that duty called. They all got up, donned their coats, and gave hearty and enthusiastic thanks to Charley for his sumptuous entertainment.

"Shucks, that was nothing a-tall. It was a pleasure to me to see you boys," declared Charley with conviction. "Be sure to call in on your way back. I wish you luck in your huntin', an' I hope that next time I see you, you'll have that dam'd buzzard along."

Soon the teams were racing up the trail. Charley followed them with his eyes till they disappeared behind a bend, then he returned to his kitchen with an air of firm determination. There was a man's job ahead of him. He expected one or two teams in that night, and the teamsters were famous trenchermen who were hard to satisfy.

Weston and his party reached the north end of Moose Lake without mishap, and normally they should get to Beaver Narrows in four or five days. But for the last couple of days Weston and Angus had given much suspicious attention to the sky, and they had shaken their heads pessimistically several times. And their pessimism was well founded. Shortly after they had left the lake behind them the sky began to cloud up rapidly, and they knew they were in for a snowfall.

"Better make camp at the first sheltered place we get to where there's plenty of firewood," counselled Weston presently. "Of course, it may only be a snowfall, but

there is a certain persistent whispering in the tree-tops which seems to indicate a blasted blizzard."

Angus grunted and nodded his agreement.

A few miles farther along the trail they came to a small clearing, surrounded by tall spruces. And quite close lay an abundant pile of dry windfalls. A forest fire had obviously gone through there some time, as several of the fallen trees were blackened and charred.

"This fine an' dandy place," announced Angus.

"Just like mother made them," agreed Weston.

Their teams were halted, and they began to prepare camp. The whisper in the tree-tops had now changed to an angry, hissing sound, and Weston frowned.

"She's going to blizz all right," he remarked. "And if I'm not much mistaken we are in for a full-grown specimen. Looks as if we have a few days of rest and leisure ahead of us, curse it!"

"Sure thing," agreed Angus. "Better make good wickiup before snow starts, an' collect plenty o' firewood."

Weston nodded, and they began some high-speed activities. Constable Mason got his first instructions in building a spruce shelter, or "wickiup," and he was amazed to see how quickly it took shape under the practised and dexterous hands of Weston and Angus, and how comfortable and solid it looked when finished. There was plenty of room inside for the three of them and their stores and equipment, and a thick mat of spruce-boughs formed a dry, springy floor.

The wickiup finished, they began to haul firewood to the camp, and they did not cease before they had piled up enough wood to last them for several days. It was quite dark before they had finished, the snow had begun to fall rapidly, and the wind was fairly shrieking through the tree-tops. But they were well sheltered from the oncoming tempest down between the tall spruces.

Soon a huge fire was roaring in front of the wickiup, and Angus, who that day officiated as cook, fished out

the pots and pans and got busy. He and Weston took turns about cooking the chief meals of each day. Mason had diffidently offered to serve his trick with the others, but, after having been closely cross-examined as to the exact standard of his efficiency, his offer had been declined with politeness but firmness. Both Weston and Angus prided themselves on their culinary expertness, and they jealously stuck up for their rights. And Mason was secretly pleased. He would have felt it rather embarrassing to have to parade his somewhat indifferent skill before the two professionals. But he was graciously permitted to prepare breakfast occasionally. As that meal only involved making coffee, frying bacon, and thawing out a few bannocks, the two experts had agreed that such simple preparations hardly offered any scope for failure.

During the night the wind rose to a gale, and the trees around the clearing creaked and groaned. The snow came down fast and thick, but the three in the wickiup were snug and comfortable, and were not in any way incommoded by the raging blizzard.

The morning brought no change.

"It looks as if we are in for several days of this sort of thing," observed Weston philosophically as they were eating their breakfast, and Angus grunted his agreement into the steaming cup of coffee he was just holding to his mouth.

For the whole of that day the blizzard raged with unabated fury, but on the following morning the wind gradually began to fall. The snowfall began to ease up, and occasionally they could see rifts in the tumbled mass of clouds overhead.

"Guess it will be all right travel t'-morrow," remarked Angus around noon.

And Angus proved right. The wind died quite down towards evening, and the morning broke bright and clear, an ideal day for travelling. But the runway on the trail, pressed hard and smooth by many sleighs having passed

over it, was no more. A vague depression in the virgin cover of snow was all that indicated its past existence.

"Here's where we shall have to do some earnest, honest toil, breaking trail," grinned Weston, as they prepared to resume their interrupted journey.

They took turns about walking ahead of the leading sleigh on the short, narrow snow-shoes used for trail-breaking. They changed around frequently, and the two walking behind assisted the dogs with the sleighs, but even so their progress was slow.

But towards noon of the fifth day they had a pleasing stroke of luck. They met a dog-train which had left Beaver Narrows after the blizzard, so now they had a good trail all the way up. The men from Beaver Narrows, two Indians, well known to both Weston and Angus, were also thankful for the broken trail presented to them by the up-going party, and said so. The only ones who did not seem to appreciate the improvement were those who ought to be primarily interested in the condition of the trail, namely, the dogs of the respective parties. They growled and snapped at each other, Angus's dogs and their colleagues of the police forming a coalition for the moment, and they had to be kept apart by sheer force. So obviously their sense of gratitude could not be highly developed.

Weston, of course, questioned the two Indians about Charley Crow, but as a source of information they proved disappointing. None of them had known Charley when he had been trapping up around Beaver Lake, as their own trap-lines had been in quite another part of the district. Nor had they any idea who had been Charley's friends. Of course they had both heard that Charley had been up there that time, and they had also heard that he had been suspected of being a fur-thief, but they had heard nothing about his having been seen up around Beaver Lake lately.

After a few moments the two parties took leave of

each other with due formality, and they went their respective ways.

From now on Weston's party was able to make excellent time, and on the afternoon of the following day they reached Beaver Narrows.

CHAPTER VIII

AT BEAVER NARROWS

BEAVER LAKE was about twenty miles long and about ten miles wide as an average. It was surrounded by spruce-covered hills, which at some points reached the height of low mountains.

Near its southern end it appeared as if two hills, one on each side of the lake, had decided to join hands, for from each hill a tract of level land stretched towards the other. They nearly joined, but not quite. Between them was still a stretch of water, not much wider than a fair-sized river, which wound for a couple of miles between the two flats till it lost itself in Little Beaver Lake to the south. Little Beaver Lake was a mere pond compared to its namesake to the north. It was only a couple of miles long, and the same in width. From its southern end flowed Beaver River, which carried the water of the two lakes towards the south.

The place where the lake contracted had naturally and logically been named Beaver Narrows, and it was the main centre of the Beaver Lake district. Here was situated on the western bank of the narrows the trading-post of the Hudson's Bay Company, while across, on the opposite bank, stood the post of Revillon Freres Trading Company, popularly known as the French Store.

On both sides of the narrows were small clusters of houses, mainly inhabited by half-breeds, and these houses constituted the village. A few miles to the north, on

the western shore of the lake, was situated the Indian Reserve.

The manager of the Hudson's Bay Company's post was one Bill Jennings, a bachelor in the early forties, while across the narrows the destinies of the French Store were ruled by Allan Gunn. Allan Gunn was married to Betty Weston's elder sister, and his wife and their boy of five lived with him at the post, in the roomy and comfortable manager's residence.

Mrs. Gunn acted as a kind of fairy godmother to the people around, and she enjoyed the respect and affection of all, white and red. Whoever had been handed some nasty slap of Fate invariably found his or her way to Mrs. Gunn, and all knew that she would do all in her power to put matters right.

One afternoon as Allan Gunn was sitting in his office keeping the wheels of commerce rotating, one of the half-breed storemen entered.

"Two dog-trains heading this way," he announced. "Looks like white men from outside."

Gunn went rapidly over to the window, breathed on the glass, and rubbed energetically to form a peep-hole through the thick accumulation of ice. He was mildly excited. White visitors from "outside" were rare this time of the year, and, consequently, extremely welcome.

"I wonder who they are?" speculated Gunn.

"Looks like police-patrol, perhaps," ventured the storeman.

"Perhaps," grunted Gunn. But the teams were still too far away for him to be able to establish the identity of any of the fur-clad travellers.

As they got nearer he thought there was something in the swing and broad shoulders of the tallest of the approaching party which reminded him strongly of Weston, but he quickly dismissed the idea as being too highly fantastical. Weston would not be leading any patrol up to this part of the country.

But suddenly the object of his scrutiny threw back his head and let out a bellowing: "Hoi!" which awoke startled echoes in the sleepy forest around. The effect of that yell on Gunn was galvanic, and he snapped into a burst of high-pressure energy.

He grabbed his coat, struggling into it as he rushed through the store, and outside he streaked up to the house at a hand-gallop. He knew that war-whoop.

He opened the door into the hall and yelled:

"Hey, Kit! Dick Weston is coming!"

The door of the sitting-room opened hurriedly, and his wife appeared, followed by her son.

"What *are* you shouting about, Allan?" she asked, half startled.

"Dick is just coming along. Hurry up, and come out to receive him."

"Are you sure?" asked his wife eagerly.

"'Course I'm sure. He just let out that Apache-yell of his. Hurry up!"

"Is Uncle Dick coming?" cried Master Robert Gunn, who answered cheerfully to the name of "Tootles." "Has he got something for me, do you think, Mummy?"

"Hey! Where are you going, Tootles?" cried Gunn as his son and heir tried to squeeze past him.

"Going out to see Uncle Dick."

"Not without your coat. Hurry up, and Mummy will help you," grinned Gunn.

Mrs. Gunn had pulled on a fur-coat, and she now rapidly assisted Master Gunn into a miniature caribou-coat, complete with hood, and then the whole family strode out in force to receive the arrivals.

The two sleighs were just rounding the corner down by the store-building, and came straight on to the house.

"Hello, Dick, old scout!" shouted Gunn, flinging himself at Weston as soon as the sleighs stopped. "This is some surprise. How are you, you old son-of-a-gun?"

And if it isn't old Angus! " he continued, turning to that worthy, who was grinning from ear to ear. " Gosh, it's just like old times seeing you two on the trail. And welcome to you, Mason. I bet you've had to hump yourself, travelling with those two sour-doughs."

" Well, at least I found out I didn't know as much about travelling as I thought I did," admitted the young constable with a grin.

" Well, Dick. How are you, and how is mother, Betty and little Dick getting along? " smiled Mrs. Gunn.

" Fit and fine, thanks," answered Weston. " They all seem to thrive down in Southern California. Betty says that your mother is firmly determined to persuade your dad to sell out his business and move down there for good," informed Weston with a grin.

But young Master Gunn, who thought the conversation wholly irrelevant and utterly uninteresting, put a stop to any further exchange of confidences for the time being. He tugged at Weston's coat.

" Uncle Dick, have you brought something for me? " he asked, looking up.

" Oh, hello, Tootles. I almost forgot all about you," cried Weston, bending down and lifting up the boy. He heaved him into the air, and caught him again, the boy burbling with joy. Weston held him out in front of him, and looked him smilingly over. " My word, Tootles, but you have grown. You are almost a big boy now."

" Yes. But have you brought anything? " persisted Tootles, determined to bring the conversation round to matters of importance.

" Well, now you mention it, I rather think there are a few things for you in my pack, somewhere," grinned Weston.

" Let me down please, Uncle," promptly cried Tootles eagerly. " I want to see."

Weston laughed, and let his wriggling captive down.

" You have to wait till we have unpacked," he said.

"You can't find anything in that mess on the sleighs. And besides, the sleighs are laced up tight." But, unconvinced and filled with optimism, Tootles wandered off to the nearest sleigh to see what he could discover.

"Better get your sleighs unpacked and the dogs fixed up, Dick," suggested Mrs. Gunn. "Of course, you'll all stay with us."

"Well, look here, Kit. It's very kind of you to offer to have us, but really I think we've better get Bill Jennings to put us up."

"But why, Dick?" asked Mrs. Gunn, staring at him in surprise.

"You see, Kit, it's like this: I'm up here to look for a man who we think is hiding somewhere in this district. And that will mean a lot of driving around, keeping all sorts of irregular hours, and that sort of thing. I tell you, it would quite demoralize the routine of your orderly *ménage* in a few days," grinned Weston.

"Who is the man you are looking for?" asked Mrs. Gunn.

"An Indian down from Lac la Ronge called Charley Crow."

"And what has he done?"

"Well, we don't know yet exactly what he's done, but we have strong suspicions that he is intimately connected up with two murders. You remember Connor?"

"Of course I do. He's stayed with us often up here. What about him?"

"Connor is dead."

"Dead? How did he die?" asked Mrs. Gunn in shocked surprise.

"He was shot. He is one of the murder cases I mentioned. I'll tell you all about it by and by."

"You mean that Connor was murdered?" exclaimed Mrs. Gunn, staring wide-eyed at Weston.

"Unfortunately, yes," nodded Weston gravely.

"Oh, how dreadful," faltered Mrs. Gunn, her eyes filling

with tears. "Connor was such a nice, bright boy. But you boys are always taking such dreadful risks. It is a wonder that not more of you have got killed."

"Oh, we manage to scrape through sometimes," smiled Weston. "But to return to this housing question. . . ."

"Yes. I can't see why you can't all stay here. You know, Dick, I shouldn't mind a bit if you upset my orderly *ménage*," declared Mrs. Gunn.

"I know. But I *do* mind. You have plenty to do as it is without having your home cluttered up by three rough-necks like us. In a bachelor establishment a mess doesn't matter so much. Besides, poor old Bill needs company, and——"

"Hey! Would you just look at that mad Injun!" shouted Allan Gunn at that moment. He had been standing chatting with Angus and Mason. Now he was pointing with his whole arm down to the narrows.

A dog-team was crossing at a wild gallop. The dogs were pulling a sleigh, and in the sleigh sat a man who was diligently flourishing a long snake-whip round his head, while his words of encouragement to his dogs reached all the way up to them.

"There's Bill," grinned Weston. "He must have seen our arrival. Wonder if he knows that I'm along?"

"Sure to," declared Gunn. "Bill doesn't cut loose like that for any casual or ordinary visitor."

And Gunn was right. As soon as Jennings's dogs had climbed the bank up from the narrows, and Jennings was within hailing distance, he opened a high-speed, long range conversation.

"Hello, Wess!" he shouted. "What are you doing up here, you old sour-dough? I spotted through my glasses who was coming up the trail, and I nearly got heart failure. I . . ."

He probably had more to say, but for the moment other more urgent matters claimed his attention. His dogs were rushing straight for the two visiting teams, looking

aggressive and determined, while the visitors were grimly and hopefully watching their approach, bristling and snarling with pugnacity.

"Whoa!" shouted Jennings, jumping out of his sleigh and turning it over on its side. "You would pick on the strangers, would you? You haven't got more manners than a bunch of rowdies."

He led the protesting team away, and tied them up well out of range of the visiting dogs, which all looked disappointed.

"Hullo, Wess! Hullo, Angus! Hullo, Mason!" he greeted, shaking each heartily by the hand as soon as he had secured his dogs. "Well, well. It certainly is good to see you, Wess, and Angus on the war-path again. Of course, you fellows are coming across to stay with me."

"I have just told Dick I expect them all to stay with us," smiled Mrs. Gunn.

"But, Mrs. Allan, consider! You can't have three toughs like those fellows defiling your nice home," protested Jennings. "It wouldn't do at all. And remember, you've got Allan and Tootles to keep you company, while I'm all alone in the world," he added, trying to strike the pathetic note. "Have a heart, Mrs. Allan."

"Well, it's your own fault you are all alone in the world, isn't it?" laughed Mrs. Gunn.

"Oh, is it!" retorted Mr. Jennings, deep protest in his voice. "I never had a chance. First you got married to Allan, and——"

"But you didn't know me till long after I was married to him, so I don't quite see your point, Bill," interrupted Mrs. Gunn.

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded Mr. Jennings with some asperity. "The fact remains that you married Allan. Then your sister came along and stayed with you that winter, and I thought at once, 'Here's your chance.' But being a bashful youth," he stated unblush-

ingly, with an airy disregard for facts, "I didn't perhaps press my suit as energetically as I ought to have done. And what happens? That chump Weston cuts in ahead of me and gets away with her. So don't say it's my fault I'm all alone in the world."

"No, it's the fault of your face, Bill," grinned Gunn.

"Well, you've got nerve!" snorted Jennings, glaring at Gunn. "Let me tell you, you ain't what I'd call an Adonis yourself. Not by miles. As a matter of fact, your wife only married you out of pity. She knew you'd never have a chance with that mug. She simply let her kind heart run away with her, to her subsequent sorrow and regret."

"Now quit paying each other compliments, you two," cut in the grinning Weston. "Let's get this business about our future home settled first. I just told my sister-in-law before you arrived, Bill, that it would be better for all if we went across and turned your place upside down."

"What's all this?" demanded Gunn. "Aren't you fellows going to stay with us?"

"No, thank you, Allan. I've explained all that to Kit. I'm up here looking for an elusive customer, and shall be busy. I'll tell you all about things in due course. Honestly, Kit, I really mean that it will be better for all that we put up with Bill. I'll promise you to spend all my spare time over here, so you'll see plenty enough of me."

"Sure," agreed Jennings heartily. "Wess is talking gospel sense."

"Oh, well, I suppose I shall have to yield to the majority," smiled Mrs. Gunn. "Especially after Bill's pathetic moans. But I insist that you all come over here to-night and have supper here."

"You bet!" cried Jennings with a broad smile. "To tell you the truth, before I left my modest home I told Mulberry-bush that I shouldn't require any supper to-night."

I somehow felt in my bones that there'd be something doing over here."

Mulberry-bush was Jennings's poetic appellation for an elderly Indian woman who kept house for him.

"Uncle Bill, Uncle Dick has brought something for me on his sleigh, but I can't find it," suddenly announced Master Gunn, lifting his head from the sleigh, where he had been poking around.

"Oh, hello, Tootles. I suppose Uncle Bill will have to play second fiddle now when Uncle Dick has arrived, and has brought something for you on his sleigh," said Jennings, grinning down at the youngster.

But Tootles vouchsafed no answer. He had once more bent to his interrupted and utterly futile task.

"Well, everything now being settled, come on you boys across to my place for a wash and doll-up," invited Jennings.

"Just half a mo', Bill," begged Weston. "I have some stuff I have to unload. Come on over here, Tootles. You've been searching the wrong sleigh."

Weston bent down over his sleigh and loosened the lashings. Then he pulled out a well-filled gunny-sack, which Tootles regarded with awed covetousness.

"Is all that for me, Uncle?" he asked, round-eyed.

"Of course it isn't, you little glutton," laughed Weston.

"There is plenty for you, but there are also a few things for Mummy and Daddy. Grab hold, Allan, and do some useful work for once." He dived into the sleigh again, and presently produced another sack, a mate to the first. "Here you are. That's the lot. I've brought some books and magazines, and I collected all your mail. There are quite a few letters. Several from your mother and your dad, Kit, and some from Betty. I also brought you a few trifles I knew you would be short of," he grinned. "Amongst other things, a leg of mutton and a round of beef."

"Oh, thank you so much, Dick!" exclaimed Mrs.

Gunn. Mutton and beef were rare treats up there. "Really, its too good of you to drag such a lot of stuff along for us. It really looks as if you have been rifling every store in Portage Bend, judging from the size of the sacks."

"He probably has," grinned Gunn. "Thank you, Dick. You are a rather useful fellow to have in the family, I'll admit."

"Well, come on, Wess!" cried Jennings impatiently. "It's getting a bit chilly standing chin-wagging around here."

"Right. Lead on, old son. Well, so long, you two. So long, Tootles." And the procession tore across to the Hudson's Bay post, the jubilant Jennings serving as out-rider.

The remainder of that day was one unbroken chain of festival and celebration. Weston had decided that all "shop" was to be banished. They all needed some relaxation after their long trip, he decreed; but in the morning they would start tackling their job in earnest. And then they would go "full out."

They did. But though their speed would have found favour with the sternest critic, it certainly looked as if it was a mere waste of energy. Weston and his henchmen were eager and willing enough, but their efforts got them simply nowhere. They seemed to be milling around in a backwater.

Their inquiries and investigations were utterly fruitless. Nobody had seen Charley Crow up around Beaver Lake, and nobody seemed to know anything about him. And what was still more discouraging, it proved quite impossible to establish the identity of Charley's associates during his previous sojourn up there. In fact, all those questioned agreed that Charley had been an utter nuisance who had been strongly suspected of being a fur-thief, and that he had practically been warned away from the district. It was therefore unlikely that he had formed any friendships;

at least, nobody had ever heard one man have a good word to say for him.

They paid a visit to Charley Crow's old trapping camp to see if they could discover any trace of him up there, but the trip proved a mere waste of time. Charley's old shack, which had obviously not been built too solidly in the first place, was now merely a tottering ruin, and there were no signs that a soul had been near the place for years.

Even Angus failed to ferret out any useful information at all, though he spent much time and patience around in the various trapping camps. And when Angus drew a blank, one could reasonably take for granted that there was not much in the line of information to pick up. If Charley had had any close associates, associates who were so intimate with him that they dared defy the police to shield him, this fact would have been public property long ago. But whoever Angus questioned invariably returned the same answer, that they were quite convinced that there was not one man in the whole district who had the slightest use for Charley Crow.

Weston began to wander around with a thoughtful frown on his face, a frown which deepened as the days passed. He found the situation extremely puzzling, to put it mildly. At times he even began to wonder whether they were not on the wrong track entirely, and whether some wily, unsuspected customer was sitting back somewhere quietly sneering at the police and their efforts. But when he then carefully and critically reviewed all circumstances once more, he could not possibly see how their reasoning could be at fault. According to the report forwarded to him from Headquarters, the fact had been firmly established that the man who had murdered Brandon was identical with the man who had occupied Charley Crow's trapping camp at Lac la Ronge, the man who had undoubtedly killed Corporal Connor. And it would be more than unlikely that anyone but Charley himself should

have sought refuge in that camp after the killing of Brandon. And, besides, if Charley Crow were not guilty, why had he disappeared so completely? No. One might safely take for granted that Charley was the very man the police wanted.

But where was that elusive gentleman? He had not turned south, that fact had also been established. But had he gone towards Beaver Lake? The story about that mysterious night-traveller which Charley, the cook, had told them about, seemed to point that way. But if Charley Crow had gone up to Beaver Lake, where was he? And why had nobody seen him up there?

Of course, argued Weston, Charley might have discovered some hiding-place when he was up that way before, and he might have made straight for that place, but then, how did he manage about supplies? From the report Weston knew the extent of Charley's commissariat when he left Prince Albert, and he further knew that Charley could not possibly have replenished his supplies since then. So having recourse to simple mathematics Weston knew positively that by now Charley Crow must be out of provisions. Consequently, if the fugitive did not want to starve to death he must get provisions from somewhere. But from where? It was out of the question for him to go near any trading post, that was obvious. Therefore, if he were hiding anywhere in the district, he must have some connecting link with the outer world. But it had been impossible to find any trace of such connecting link.

There was still the alternative that Charley had continued his flight up north, but that seemed extremely unlikely. Weston had ascertained that Charley did not know the country up that way, and that being the case he would have been discovered long ago. He could not travel at night over strange trails, and he further had to keep to the main trails. So sooner or later he must fall in with somebody. But those travellers who had arrived at Beaver

Narrows from the north had all reported that no stranger had been seen up that way lately.

It was all very discouraging. But in spite of everything Weston refused to abandon the idea that Charley was hiding somewhere in the neighbourhood. But how on earth did he manage about supplies? He simply *must* have a go-between. But the most searching inquiries refused to unearth any likely individual. There was simply no vestige of a clue anywhere. Oh, hang!

At this point in his meditations Weston's thoughts were always inclined to become profane.

On the fifth day of their stay at Beaver Narrows Sergeant Belcher and a constable arrived from Lac la Ronge. They had carried on the most searching investigations down there, but they had unearthed nothing which was not already known. Nor had they been able to pick up the slightest scrap of information about the elusive Charley on their way up.

Weston instructed the patrol from Prince Albert to return down the trail as far as to Charley's Place. There was a possibility that Charley Crow, provided he was hiding in that part of the country, might become alarmed when he heard of the searching inquiries being pushed by the police, and then he might adopt the bold course of doubling back on his tracks. If he did, he would have to pass Charley's Place, so that point would have to be closely guarded.

"Now, you chaps," continued Weston, "I want you to keep a particularly keen watch at night. One of you will have to camp on the trail a couple of miles north of Charley's Place every night. Take turn and turn about. Keep a roaring fire going, and make yourself comfortable, but be sure to stay awake. And stop every mother's son who comes along. Any of you know Charley by sight? Oh, well, the official description isn't much to go by where an Indian is concerned. A lot of them look pretty much alike. However, don't let anybody pass before

you are quite satisfied about their identity. If in doubt, let Charley inspect them. He'll soon tell you who's who. Of course he may circle around the place through the woods, but it's highly improbable that he will cut out of the trail as far up as a couple of miles. I don't think he's more keen on breaking trail than the rest of us. But to be on the safe side you will have to patrol the trail about five miles up every day, and if you find that anybody has left the trail at any point, investigate. And if you find that somebody has circled Charley's Place completely, then chase after him as fast as you can go. That will be your man without a doubt. Cut down sleep and rest to a minimum. And remember, the fellow will probably travel at night, so if you discover a trail cutting into the woods any day, follow it. That will in all probability lead to his lair. Now, all understood?"

"Yessir," answered the sergeant.

"Good. Get off early to-morrow morning. Get all you require from the store here. And keep your eyes wide open. You aren't in for a rest-cure, but if you manage to catch that fellow it will mean one step towards promotion," ended the inspector with a grin.

The following afternoon Weston was sitting in the living-room across at Gunn's place. He was looking thoughtfully down at his nephew, who was playing around on the floor with some of his new toys. Mrs. Gunn was busy on some needlework.

Weston had earlier in the day had another lengthy chat with the chief on the Reserve. The subject matter of their conversation had been the less respectable members of the community who would probably feel inclined to aid Charley. But their discussion had been fruitless. The few men in that category were all hanging around the Reserve doing nothing, according to the chief, and to get in touch with them Charley Crow would have to visit the Reserve. Now the chief was quite positive that if that had been the case he would have

heard about it. So the frowning inspector had to return to Beaver Narrows without having got one step farther.

Angus and Constable Mason had been away since yesterday. They had gone up to visit a trapping camp up on the north end of the lake, but Weston expected them back that evening. Weston had nothing to do till they arrived with their report, so he had walked across to amuse himself with young Tootles.

While Weston was idly watching Tootles steering a toy locomotive around the room, his brain busy with the annoying question of Charley Crow, he suddenly sat up straight and looked blankly at Mrs. Gunn.

"My word!" he exclaimed, "what a fool I am. What an unmitigated ass!" he added for good measure.

"What on earth is the matter, Dick?" asked his sister-in-law, letting her sewing drop into her lap while she stared at Weston with amazement.

Even Tootles looked curiously up at his uncle.

"Yes, just look, both of you, at the prize fool," continued Weston.

"Daddy says only little boys are fools," observed Tootles gravely.

"Oh, well, I suppose Daddy is right in a general way," smiled Weston. "But there's always an exception. And I'm it! Don't you think I look like a fool, Tootles?"

Tootles inspected his uncle long and earnestly.

"What does a fool look like?" he inquired presently.

"Never mind, Tootles," said Weston hurriedly. When Tootles started being inquisitive there was no telling where he would stop. "But . . . Oh, my word, what an ass I've been!" he groaned.

"What is the matter, Dick?" repeated Mrs. Gunn. "And why this sudden self-depreciation?"

"I have just thought of what I should have done when I first arrived if I hadn't been such a hopeless imbecile," sighed Weston. "I suppose my brain is deteriorating

from sitting all day long in an office, doing routine-work. It is beginning to lose its celebrated elasticity, as it were," he grinned. "Well, I must hop along. I have to hold pow-wow with Allan and Bill at once, if not sooner. Good-bye, Kit. Good-bye, Tootles. I must run. Perhaps you won't see me for a few days if my new theory works."

And before his astonished sister-in-law had time to ask him a single question he had disappeared.

Weston next appeared in Gunn's office.

"Hey, Allan!" he called. "Cease all your futile work on your piffing books. There's a man's job ahead of you."

"What's up now, Dick?" asked Gunn, looking up at Weston. "Your brow looks somewhat clearer. Had a brain-wave?"

"Brain-wave is right! I just told Kit and Tootles that I was a prize fool, and they none of them contradicted me. And I should have felt seriously annoyed if they had, because truth is truth. Now, Allan my lad, answer this simple question: what does a man need if he wants to live and thrive?"

"Oh, quite a few things. But first and foremost grub, I should say," answered Gunn judiciously.

"Right first time, little boy. You can move right up to the top of the class," grinned Weston. "Now, we know that Charley Crow is short on grub, if not right out of it. We also know that he can't go into a store to buy it. So what does he do?"

"Gets it from somebody else, of course."

"Right again. Full marks for you. Now that somebody else must of necessity be a trapper, so if he lets Charley have some of his grub, what happens to Mr. Trapper?"

"He'll be shy of grub himself."

"Better and better, my boy. Now we both know trappers and their ways, and we know that they always

take along with them an outfit to the camp sufficient to see them through the season. So if any of them runs short of grub this time of the season, and comes in to refit, it is on account of some extraordinary circumstance, as, for instance, having handed grub over to somebody else. Consequently——”

“Dash it, Dick!” exclaimed Gun, smiting the table in front of him a resounding whack, “I think you have discovered the maggot in the cheese.”

“That’s also my own modest opinion,” grinned Weston. “And there is another thing. Mr. Charley Crow has got what in vulgar parlance is called an unholy wad in his jeans. And it’s fairly obvious that he would have to fork out some of his lucre for grub and silence. And, knowing the Indians like we do, we can take it for granted that whoever was allowed a share of Charley’s wealth would streak in to the post pretty suddenly and try to get rid of some of it. We both know that the rooted conviction of any self-respecting Indian is that cold cash burns a hole in his pocket. So get busy at once on your numerous staff, my lad. If we find out that a chap who has been outfitting well and wisely at the opening of the season has been in lately for fresh supplies, we can almost take for granted that that person is Charley’s friend in need. And if he has paid cash for his purchases we are quite certain. So off you go, but be discreet.”

Allan disappeared into the store, and returned in a few minutes.

“I drew a blank, Dick,” he announced, disappointment in his voice. “There has been nobody in lately buying an outfit. All sales have been quite normal. And there have been no cash sales, except for an odd dollar now and then.”

“Never mind. We’ll go across to Bill and try our luck at his emporium. But pass the word to your people to report any big sales or cash sales to you at once.”

"Right. I'll go along with you across to Bill's. I'm rather keen on seeing if this idea works."

"Suit yourself. Far be it from me to stand between you and your innocent amusements," grinned Weston. "Only hurry up if you are coming."

Some fifteen minutes later Weston presented his new brain-child to Bill Jennings. When he got as far as to his theory about the cash, Jennings sat up in his chair with a jerk.

"Dam' it, Wess! " he exclaimed. " I just remember. What a fool I've been! "

"Shake," laughed Weston, holding out his hand, "I'm another, and misery likes company. But what's it all about? "

"Oh, hang! I thought it rather funny at the time, but it plumb slipped my memory till this minute," deprecated Jennings. "Though I ought to know that anything out of the ordinary would be of interest to you."

"Which all sounds more interesting than lucid," remarked Weston. "What was funny, and what slipped your memory? "

Instead of answering Jennings got up and walked across to the apology for a safe the office boasted. He opened it and extracted some notes.

"Take a look at those," he cried, slamming them down on the desk in front of Weston and Gunn. "They were all passed in one day about a fortnight ago by one person, and that person certainly bought up enough provisions to last them two or three months."

Weston picked up the bills.

"Five ten-dollar bills," he announced, and Allan Gunn whistled.

"It certainly looks as if you were getting warm, Dick," he said.

"It does. And who is the local Rockefeller who has been scattering his wealth so recklessly about? " asked Weston.

"*Her* wealth," corrected Jennings with a smile. "The person was a lady."

"Oh, dash!" exclaimed Weston. "No wonder my inquiries got me nowhere. I was looking for a man all the time. It never entered my head that Charley might be a gay Lothario, and that he had some paramour up here."

"You are quite off the mark, Wess," laughed Jennings. "The lady has a husband, is perfectly respectable, has been married for sixteen years or so, has three kids, and has never been known to be flighty. Besides, she lacks the looks which lead a woman into trouble."

"Well, who is this paragon of virtue?" asked Weston.

"She's the wife of Nathan Otter. He's got a trapping camp a couple of days' journey to the north-east," explained Jennings. "Mrs. Otter came down to the store about a fortnight ago, and bought a lot of provisions and some other stuff which took her fancy. She rather spread herself, I know, because when I found these bills among the modest hoard of the day, I got a shock, and I simply had to find out where the opulence came from. And when my boys told me that it was Mrs. Otter who had been scattering largesse about, I got another shock, because I had never known the Otters to be burdened with cash at any time. However, what with one thing and another, the whole matter had completely slipped my mind till you quoted your little piece, Wess." He sounded deeply apologetic.

"Never mind, Bill," grinned Weston, "all is well that ends well. What kind of customer is Nathan Otter? Is he the kind of fellow who'd chum up with a character like Charley Crow?"

"I shouldn't say so. He is quite all right, as far as I know," said Jennings reflectively. "He's a quiet fellow, and a steady trapper during the seasons. I have

never heard anyone say a bad word against him. Have you ever heard anything, Allan?"

"Never one word. I always considered Nathan one of the more respectable members of our community," answered Gunn.

"Humph," grunted Weston thoughtfully, handing back the bills to Jennings. "Perhaps Charley has bought him over. Where else could he have got hold of those bills? Have there been any free-traders up here lately?"

"No. We've not been pestered with any of those afflictions this season so far," said Jennings, and Allan Gunn agreed with a nod. "That was one reason I thought it so surprising that Mrs. Otter should turn up with a fistful of such big bills."

"And then there are those supplies she bought," murmured Weston reflectively. "I suppose the Otter family took a full outfit with them when they went out to camp? So that there is no chance that they may have run short of grub by now?"

"I'll find out in two ticks," said Jennings. He took a ledger, opened it, and studied a certain page for some minutes. "No," he announced, closing the ledger with a bang. "Nathan took plenty of grub and things out to the camp with him. Enough for him, his wife, and the three kids for the whole of the season. They still ought to have plenty left."

"They couldn't have lost any of their outfit through some accident; a fire or something?" asked Weston.

"No fear. If that had been the case, Mrs. Otter would have told all about it when she was in here, and it would have been all over the place long ago. No. That's quite out of the question," averred Jennings emphatically.

"Well then it rather looks as if this Mr. Nathan Otter might be the missing link I have been looking for," observed Weston. "At least, several things point that way. I wish Angus and Mason would hurry up and get

back to-night. I want to have a little chat with Mr. Otter as soon as possible."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Allan Gunn. "Nathan will in all probability deny that he knows Charley Crow, and torture went out of fashion years ago, I understand, while third degree stuff is tabooed in this country, as far as I know."

"Don't you worry, my learned friend," jeered Weston, "I have a few degrees of my own. I can see the glimmer of a brilliant idea already, and I'm going to develop it slowly but surely. But listen, you chaps, not a word about this to anybody."

"Of course not! Do you take us for mutts?" in indignant chorus.

"Judgment reserved, and accused dismissed under grave doubts," grinned Weston, whereat his audience looked pained.

"Better break up this meeting before Wess gets personal and rude," suggested Jennings.

"You're dam'd right," agreed Gunn. "Come on, Dick, let's get back. You are coming over for supper, Bill, aren't you?"

But before Jennings had time to answer, Weston cut in:

"No, thanks, Allan. I'm going to stay here to-night and sample a dose of Bill's hospitality. Honestly, old man," he continued, noticing Gunn's disappointment, "I have to. I have to cultivate this budding scheme of mine. And I must be on the spot when Mason and Angus return. We have to go into committee as soon as possible, as it were, and discuss our plans for the immediate future. I want to start out bright and early to-morrow morning, so we must have everything cut and dried to-night."

"Oh, well. But Kit will be awfully disappointed, you know."

"No, she won't. I told her before I left that I might not return for some days. Just tell her I've spotted a

clue. That sounds exciting," grinned Weston. "And tell her I have to follow up the elusive thread forthwith."

"But when will you be back, you think?"

"Who knows?" asked Weston airily. "First we have to find Charley, if he can be found, and after that we have to catch him. And if he doesn't take kindly to the idea of arrest, that may be a bit of a problem. So heaven only knows when we shall be back. Dash it! I wish Angus and Mason would get a move on."

Mason and Angus did. They arrived shortly after dusk.

They both grew hopeful when they heard of the latest developments. This was at least a clue to work on, though it seemed rather slender. But something was better than nothing they both agreed.

Weston by this time also had a plan ready, and he forthwith paraded it before his two henchmen and Jennings. They all agreed that the scheme was quite sound, and that it ought to work, provided, of course, that Nathan Otter was really mixed up with Charley Crow.

They completed all arrangements for their trip that evening. They were only going to take one sleigh, and that was packed and laced up ready for the morning.

Bill Jennings minutely described the way to Nathan's camp, and further gave them all particulars which might prove useful, along with his blessing.

They retired to bed early, and before the new day had properly earned the right to its name, the three were guiding their dog-team towards the north-west, over a smooth, frost-covered trail.

CHAPTER IX

NATHAN OTTER

THE following afternoon found Weston and his companions camped near the trail, approximately some four miles from Nathan Otter's camp, as far as they were able to judge from the directions furnished them. Nathan's camp was lying quite isolated, and the trail leading up to it was just a faint, ribbon-like sleigh-track, which had evidently not been travelled for some time.

As soon as they had stopped, Angus had put on his snow-shoes and had slipped quietly into the forest beside the trail. He was going up to Nathan's camp on a preliminary reconnaissance. Weston wanted to make quite sure that Nathan would be at home when he paid his visit. He did not want to waste any time in chasing around after Nathan on the latter's trapping line, where he might risk to miss him. Nor did he want to give any member of the Otter family a chance to slip out to warn Nathan of the impending interview with the police, so he might be prepared and have time to concoct some brilliant yarn. So Weston had decided that, should Nathan prove to be away, they would wait where they were till he returned home. Weston was a staunch believer in the importance of the element of surprise in police work, and besides, he had other reasons for his decision.

Shortly before dusk Angus returned. He had kept well back in the forest, away from the trail, on his way

up, and from a discreet and unobtrusive point of vantage he had established the fact that Nathan Otter was dallying in the family circle.

"Good," said Weston. "Then we'll go up there bright and early to-morrow morning, so we catch him before he starts out to look after his traps."

Dawn was almost an hour away when Weston and Mason set out. Angus had rolled his blankets and some food into a neat pack, which he slung over his back, and on his snow-shoes he tramped into the forest on a mission of his own.

A couple of furlongs up the trail Weston and Mason rounded the spur of a small hill and found themselves on an open stretch of muskeg. There was a stinging, biting breeze streaming down from the north over that unbroken level which caused much distress to the unprotected parts of their faces, but about three miles ahead the trail once more dived into the screening forest, and their petty annoyances were forgotten.

The day had just broken when they swung into the clearing where Nathan Otter's shack was situated, and Nathan's dogs, which were chained up to trees around, barked a noisy welcome, for which courtesy Weston's dogs quitted with gusto and good-will.

The door of the shack opened and an Indian came out. He was of medium size, inclined to bow-legs, like most of his tribesmen, but he looked well-proportioned and wiry. His swarthy face was adorned with a somewhat scraggy moustache, but there was nothing in his features which in any way suggested the black sheep. In fact, to Weston's experienced and discerning eyes he looked about like ninety per cent. of his red brethren; rather better if anything. He seemed perfectly at his ease, and did not seem to be particularly surprised at this visitation by the police, but Weston did not put too much stock in the fact. He knew full well the Indian's faculty for concealing his emotions and feelings at any time.

"*Tansi*," greeted Weston, holding out his hand with a friendly smile.

"*Peguan*," answered Nathan, giving the proffered hand a shake.

After he had gone through the same ceremony with Mason, Nathan invited the two officers into his shack.

They found the remainder of the Otter family squatting on the floor under the cabin's one and only window, around the remnants of their breakfast. They consisted of Mrs. Otter, a matronly squaw; a lad of fifteen or sixteen; and two girls of about respectively eleven and eight.

The cabin boasted a table and two chairs in addition to three bunks and a cooking-stove, but the family evidently preferred to let the floor furnish them with combined seating accommodation and table, in common with the majority of the Indians.

Weston, who was an authority on native etiquette, went up and shook hands with Mrs. Otter, followed by Mason, while Nathan placed the two chairs for the visitors. Mrs. Otter and her children remained seated on the floor, but Nathan perched himself on the edge of one of the bunks.

Weston did not blurt out his errand. He was too well versed in the custom of the country for that. Instead, he began a rambling conversation with Nathan about trapping and kindred subjects. He had taken pains to learn the Cree tongue when he first came to the Northland, and he now spoke it fluently.

Mason was no linguist. He knew a few words of Cree, but the smooth and flowing conversation between Weston and Nathan might just as well have been Chinese for all the benefit he got out of it. So he amused himself by watching the rest of the Otter family. The dark, serious eyes of the two younger children wandered unceasingly from Mason to Weston and vice versa. Apparently they were taking in every point of their looks and attire. Especially did the bright brass buttons, which had been revealed when they had opened their caribou-

coats on entering the shack, seem to exercise a vivid fascination over the two little dusky girls.

The boy had his unwinking gaze fixed on Weston's face, his own features gravely immobile, while Mrs. Otter sat with her hands folded in her lap, her eyes cast down.

"You have a good bunch of skins here," said Weston presently. He got up and strolled over to where a collection of stretched pelts were hanging on the wall. He rummaged amongst the skins, and looked appraisingly at some of the more valuable varieties. "Yes. Quite a good collection. Have you had a good season so far, Nathan?"

"Uhu. Quite good," grunted Nathan.

"How are fur prices at the companies this season?" continued Weston.

"I don't know much about it," answered Nathan. "I have hardly sold any skins so far."

"Do you know what prices the free-traders offer this year?" asked Weston, walking back to his chair, his inspection finished.

"No, I don't know. We have had no free-traders up here this season."

There was a pause for a moment or so, then Weston suddenly asked:

"Where is Charley Crow hiding, Nathan?"

Weston did not look at Nathan when he put his query. His eyes were apparently gazing idly into space, but for all that he was watching Mrs. Otter closely. He saw her start slightly, and look quickly up at her husband, an expression of apprehension flashing across her face. But it was only a flash. The next second she had shifted her gaze back to the floor, but the flash had not escaped Weston's alert eyes, and he felt a thrill of satisfaction.

"I do not know where Charley Crow is," came Nathan's answer promptly. "I have not seen him since he was up here some seasons ago. Why do you want him?"

"I want him," said Weston bluntly, looking squarely

at Nathan, "because he is suspected of having murdered a lumber-man near Prince Albert, and of having shot a policeman dead at Lac la Ronge."

For a moment Nathan's mask was askew. His face expressed both perturbation and startled surprise.

"Charley Crow killed a red-coat?" he asked quickly.

"He did. At least, he's strongly suspected. And I want him. You know the penalty for shielding a murderer, Nathan, don't you? It will mean imprisonment for a long time for you if it is proved that you have helped to hide him, unless you confess to the police. So what have you got to say?"

But by now Nathan had regained his self-control, and his face was again a set, impenetrable mask.

"I know nothing about Charley Crow," he stated. "Why should I?"

"You know, Nathan, I find out many things which are hidden from others," said Weston with the touch of grandiloquence he felt the situation demanded, though he was supremely thankful that Mason knew no Cree, "and I feel quite convinced that you are shielding Charley Crow. If you tell me where he is hiding, no harm will come to you, but if you do not tell, you will get yourself into great trouble."

But Nathan seemed unimpressed by the rather direct threat.

"I know nothing about Charley Crow," he averred stoutly. "As I told you before, I haven't seen him since he was up here that trapping season some years ago."

"Very well, Nathan," said Weston quietly. "Just now we are on our way to a camp two days' travel north of here. It has been reported that a stranger has been seen up that way some days ago. If that stranger is not Charley Crow, I shall know that you have been lying to me. And then I shall come straight back here. That will be in four or five days. By then many of my men will have arrived at Beaver Narrows, and we shall search

every valley, draw, and ravine around your camp. And we shall find Charley Crow even if it takes us the rest of the winter to do it. And when we have found him, we shall deal with you. Have you still nothing to say?"

"I cannot say anything about matters I know nothing about," was Nathan's quiet answer.

"All right. We'll go our way then," said Weston, getting up.

He and Mason again shook hands with Mrs. Otter, nodded to the children, and strode out of the cabin, followed by their host.

When they had turned their dogs into the trail again, and stood ready to depart, Weston turned to Nathan.

"Is your memory still bad?" he asked.

"No. My memory is good, but I cannot remember what I have never known," was Nathan's response.

"Very well. Good-bye, then. But remember, we shall be back in four or five days," was Weston's final warning just before he turned to follow the dog-train.

They travelled straight down the trail to their camp of the previous night. There Weston halted the dog-train, hurriedly put on his snow-shoes, and instructed Mason to make himself comfortable where he was without lighting any fire.

Weston walked straight through the woods to the top of the small hill they had passed on the edge of the muskeg, and carefully concealed behind some brush, he watched the trail. He suspected that if he were right in his theory about Nathan, somebody might follow on their tracks to see them safely off the premises.

After he had waited patiently for about fifteen minutes he saw a dark form appear cautiously from behind a clump of brush near the trail across the muskeg. For a while it stood looking down the trail, then it disappeared slowly into the thicket again.

Weston grinned.

"If my eyes do not deceive me, that was Mr. Otter,

junior," he told himself. "Daddy has probably posted him there to carry warning in case we should return. Suspicious-minded gentleman, Mr. Nathan Otter, senior."

For another fifteen minutes Weston waited. He wanted to satisfy himself that the spy did not intend to pursue his investigations farther down the trail. But he saw no more of the watcher on the other side.

"He's anchored there for the day, I suppose," he muttered, "so I might as well get back and proceed with this business."

He walked rapidly back to the waiting Mason.

"The Otter family is worried," he explained to Mason with a smile. "They have posted a sentry across the swamps, presumably to see if we are going to return. As far as I could make out at that distance, the watcher was the young son."

"That seems to prove that we are getting warni, sir," remarked Mason hopefully.

"That and other things. Did you notice, Mason, how perturbed Mrs. Otter looked when I put the question to Nathan where Charley Crow was hiding? "

"Well, sir, to be quite frank, I didn't," confessed Mason with an embarrassed grin. "I am not much up in Cree, sir, so I couldn't follow your conversation."

"No, that's right. I forgot you didn't know much Cree. You ought to learn it, Mason. You have no idea how useful it is when you deal with Indians. You can't size up a fellow's story properly when you have it served via an interpreter. If you know the language, you can soon make up your mind whether a story sounds straight or not. The first thing I did, when I came to this part of the world, was to learn Cree, and it's been a tremendous advantage in my work."

"I know, sir. And I have begun to take lessons down at the Bend. But I'm afraid I haven't made much of a fist of it so far," said Mason with an apologetic smile.

"Well, keep it up. And practice every chance you

get. And another thing you ought to remember : When questioning an Indian you can never read anything from his face, so if he has got a wife, and she is present, watch her. A squaw hasn't got the same iron control of her features as a buck. However, you'll gradually pick up these little tricks for yourself. Let's have some grub before we start. God knows when we'll have our next chance for a hot meal. We'll risk a small fire. There won't be enough smoke to tell the watcher that we are still amongst those present. The hill screens us."

"There is something about this business I can't quite understand," mused Weston aloud while they waited for the kettle to boil. His brow was puckered in a thoughtful frown. "If Nathan really knows Charley Crow's hiding-place, why wouldn't he tell? I felt fairly confident that he would spill all he knew when I sprung my somewhat direct threats, but evidently he has made up his mind to play oyster."

"I suppose he has been promised good pay for his silence, sir, the money to be paid after the danger is over. Kind of no-cure-no-pay business, I mean, sir," suggested Mason diffidently.

"That won't quite explain Nathan's reticence. He knows he'll go to prison if it is discovered that he has been shielding Charley, and an Indian hates prison worse than he does losing money. Besides, Nathan did not at all look the type who would openly defy the police for the sake of a few dollars. Appears to me to be something fishy about this business. One thing I'm quite certain of : whatever Nathan Otter may know about Charley Crow, he did not know that the latter was suspected of having killed a policeman. His surprise was too genuine for that, when I told him about it. And that makes it all the more surprising that he would not tell me anything. Of course, he may have spoken the truth. Perhaps he really knows nothing about Charley, but is mixed up in some other shady business. But there is something rotten some-

where. Nathan wouldn't have sent his son down the trail to spy on us if he isn't scared of us for some reason or other. But it's no use speculating about all this. We'll just follow the trail we have mapped out for ourselves and see where it leads us."

If Weston could have watched Nathan's movements after they had left his happy home, he would certainly have been strengthened in his belief that there was something fishy about him. No sooner had the two police officials disappeared in the forest than Nathan stirred into frantic action.

He burst into the shack and shouted to his son :

"Boy! Follow the red-coats down to the swamps, where you have a clear view of the trail for about three miles. Watch the trail all day, and if they come back, run at once up to the top of that high hill behind the cabin, and light a fire. Put on plenty of snow now and then, so it smokes well, and keep it burning till night."

The son grunted his understanding. He rose to his feet, and hurriedly prepared a small pack of provisions. Then he donned his furs and started down the trail at a dog-trot.

Nathan's wife looked searchingly up at her husband.

"Do you know where Charley Crow is hidden?" she asked. "And is that the man who came here that night, the man you wouldn't have us see?"

But Nathan, who was hurriedly preparing a pack for himself, only vouchsafed a grunt, which could be taken either for a denial or confirmation.

"If you know something about that man, why did you not tell the police, so you could avoid trouble for yourself?" tried Mrs. Otter once more.

"Woman, do not talk about matters you know nothing about," rebuked her lord sternly. "I'm going out," he continued, "and if anybody asks for me, tell him I'm out on my trap-line, and won't return till to-morrow night. Remember that."

He quickly donned his coat, slung his pack over his shoulders, grabbed his rifle, and left the shack.

Outside he adjusted his snow-shoes, and soon he was striding rapidly eastward, along the trail following his trap-line, his wife's anxious eyes following him till he had disappeared.

Nathan was sorely worried. He knew only too well where to find Charley Crow. Entirely too well. And he cursed the distressing circumstances which forced him to screen that individual when all his natural instincts decidedly urged him to divulge all he knew to the police. But as matters stood, his own safety depended on his keeping his mouth tightly closed. And Nathan cursed Fate and Charley freely and impartially as he strode gloomily along.

CHAPTER X

CHARLEY CROW

MR. CHARLEY CROW was a gentleman with pronounced predatory proclivities. Like many of his brethren, red and white, he had a burning desire to become a man of opulence, who could lead a life of ease and leisure; only, that desirable state had to be reached through no excessive demands on his own energies. He had explored several avenues in his search for the one which would lead to his goal, but with indifferent success. He had tried honest trapping, but as that trade had not led to the quick returns he had looked for, he had extended his activities to include other people's trapping lines as well. But as he began to notice that he was being regarded with a certain amount of suspicion by his own people, he decided to transfer his activities to more distant fields. So he trekked up to the rich fur country around Beaver Lake.

For about one half of the trapping season all had gone fairly well. Of course, officially, Charley was merely an honest, hard-working trapper; but most of his time was occupied in picking a lot of the more valuable furs out of other men's traps, leaving the inferior catch alone. But soon a muttering began to spread through the neighbourhood on account of the unprecedented number of traps that were being found sprung and empty. By and by a few broad hints were conveyed to Charley. It was pointed out to him that, as he was a stranger amongst them, a further excess of sprung, empty traps might have disagreeable consequences for him.

Charley knew that the hints were not to be regarded as mere playful badinage, and he regretfully decided that his activities in that district were about over. But as it would look a little too pointed if he left right away, he deemed it wise to remain till the close of the season and run his line. And besides, only some few miles to his west was located a white trapper, and a few judicious visits to his traps would hardly excite comment. Not amongst the Indians and half-breeds, at least. And what the white man thought about it did not interest Charley, as long as he covered his tracks properly. If the white trapper got suspicious at all, he would suspect every Indian and half-breed in the whole district on general principles, rather than any one individual, was Charley's conviction.

Then one day Charley decided that it was about time he prepared for another visit to the white man's traps. He did not believe in overdoing the thing for fear the trapper should get so enraged, and raise such a fuss, that Charley's activities might get exposed. So he had decided to confine himself to only about two visits every week.

In the forenoon he started across to look the ground over, and to find out which part of his line the trapper was working that day. As soon as that point had been safely established, Charley himself would inspect that same section of the line on the morrow, when the rightful owner was occupied elsewhere.

At last he topped a ridge and started crossing it carefully, taking full advantage of all cover. On the other side of the ridge lay an open stretch of frozen swamp, and just across that swamp, along the foot of the ridge beyond, ran part of the trapper's line.

Suddenly Charley halted and listened suspiciously. Voices had floated up to him from below; voices which sounded as if they were raised in anger.

He quickly slipped forward and took cover behind a spruce on the edge of the ridge. He moved cautiously so

he could get a view of the swamp below, and peered down.

Out on the level near the opposite ridge, some hundred and fifty yards in front of him, stood the white trapper in a heated argument with an Indian. The Indian was a man down from Beaver Narrows called Nathan Otter, Charley knew. On the cold, clear air sound travelled far, so Charley could pick up enough of their words to make him grin. The white trapper was hotly accusing Nathan Otter of having been pilfering his traps, and Nathan was indignantly denying the unjust accusation.

"Well, some son o' a —— has been raidin' my line steady, an' if it ain't you what's you doin' aroun' here, anyhow?" shouted the enraged white man.

"I tell you me out lookin' for moose!" retorted Nathan. "Whyfor you think me carry rifle for stealin' your fur?" he asked, pointing to the rifle he was carrying in his hand.

"Guess you carry your dam' rifle to defen' yourself in case you gets caught red-handed, you lyin' ——!" raged the trapper. "You dam' Injuns is a lot o' useless ——, all o' you; an' a thievin' bunch o' God dam' ——!"

Stung to the quick by the slurs on his race and the accompanying epithets, the Indian threw discretion and diplomacy to the winds.

"You white men is all a bunch o' no-good ——!" he snarled, using the vilest and foulest words of abuse which were included in his vocabulary.

Beside himself with rage at having words like that hurled at him by an Indian, the trapper raised the wooden club he was carrying in his hand, which he used for disposing of the live catch in his traps, and took a quick, threatening step forward. In sudden panicky alarm Nathan Otter half raised his rifle and pressed the trigger. The report of the shot echoed and re-echoed between the surrounding spruce-clad hills; the white trapper twisted sideways, crumpled up, and dropped to the ground.

For a few moments Nathan stood staring at the huddled,

still form at his feet as if stupefied. Then he bent down and carefully examined the body. Finally he straightened up, shaking his head, and the watcher on the ridge understood that the white trapper was dead.

For a while Nathan stood as if undecided, then he suddenly nodded his head, having evidently made up his mind what to do.

First he took a careful, searching survey of the surrounding country, though it was less than likely that anyone should be close. Charley kept very still behind his spruce, so his presence passed unnoticed.

Having finished his examination of the immediate neighbourhood to his satisfaction, Nathan removed one of the dead man's snow-shoes, and with this in his hand he walked across to a level stretch which looked like the surface of a small lake or pond. Using the spare snow-shoe as a shovel, he removed the snow from a small area and soon got down to ice. Then he took his axe out of his pack and hammered with the back of the axe-head against the ice, while he listened intently. Finally he nodded his head as if satisfied, and with the edge of the axe he began to hack a hole through the ice some three feet by three.

After about ten minutes' hard work he had cleared a way down to the black water underneath.

He then walked back to the dead body, fastened the snow-shoe he had removed back on its foot, and then half dragged, half carried the body across to the water-hole.

Head foremost he pushed it into the water, and, using the dead man's club, he shoved the body along under the ice as far as his arm and the club would reach. Then he shoved the club in after.

This task finished, Nathan Otter scooped the lumps of ice he had chopped away back into the hole, and straightened up. Again he glanced searchingly around, but discovered nothing to alarm him.

He looked thoughtfully down at the hole for a few

moments, then, apparently having mapped out his further course, he picked up his pack, slung it over his back, and walked briskly away towards the woods across the swamp.

From his point of vantage Charley had been an interested spectator to the events so far. He had approved fully of the proceedings, and could find no fault with them, but it was not in his programme to make his presence known just then. He saw where he could turn the affair to good advantage by exercising some discretion. However, he was beginning to find it extremely chilling sitting quiet behind the spruce, so he decided it was time to shift. He felt pretty certain of what the rest of Nathan's programme would be. Nathan would make up a fire somewhere in the woods, would dry out his wet sleeve, and in half an hour or so, when the lumps of ice in the hole had frozen to a solid mass, he would return and shovel the snow back on top. And eventually only a few innocent-looking snow-shoe tracks would mark the place.

So, while Nathan's back was turned on him, Charley backed cautiously away from his shelter, and was soon tramping rapidly back to his own camp.

Having eaten a hasty meal he walked back to his earlier point of observation, and took stock of the situation. He had guessed correctly. The swamp below him was now innocent of any scar on its surface. Nathan Otter had even been so careful that he had tramped around all over the ground, as a man who had discovered something of interest, and who had shifted about to follow that something with his eyes. And the patch of red, where the trapper had fallen, had quite disappeared.

Charley grinned, and nodded emphatic approval. The tragedy was well hidden, and would in all human probability remain an unsolved mystery for always. When the white trapper was eventually missed, people might make a search for him, but it would be about as profitable as looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. And the searchers would soon give up, feeling satisfied in their

own minds that the missing man had been the victim of some accident in the woods, and that the wolves had picked his bones clean. It would probably be months before he was missed at all, and by that time the snowshoe tracks on the muskeg would have been erased by snow or wind. And during summer the muskeg would be impassable, so there was no chance of anybody discovering the body, even if it should float up.

Having seen all there was to see, Charley turned about and started on a circuitous trip which would eventually take him to the dead trapper's line, well away from the swamps. He did not want to have an unbroken line of tracks running from that swamp to his own camp just then. He knew accidents did happen occasionally, and he preferred to be on the safe side, especially taking his reputation into consideration.

Having reached a point on the trap-line several miles away from the scene of the tragedy, he made good time to the late trapper's shack. He was glad the deceased had come up by canoe in the fall and not by dog-team. Dogs around the camp would have been rather embarrassing. He could not have shot them, as that would have pointed too directly towards foul play; he could not have let them loose, because they would have streaked across to some camp and inquiries would have followed; and he could not have let them remain chained up, as at least one or two would have worked out of their collars, which would lead to the same results as the second alternative. So he was decidedly pleased at the absence of embarrassing dogs.

He took careful stock of what he found in the shack. He made a bundle out of the majority of the more valuable pelts, but he took care to leave sufficient behind to exclude any suspicion of robbery. He added the choicest items of the dead trapper's provisions to his bundle, packed it up, slung it across his back, and took his departure, closing the door carefully behind him. He did not follow

the trapping-line back, but struck straight north into the woods, and worked around to his own camp through a tract of country where there was small likelihood of falling in with any humans.

He arrived back in his own camp late that evening, and he chuckled as he examined his haul. There were one silver fox, two cross-foxes, four red, twelve martens, twenty-one minks, one fisher, six otters, and a bunch of weasels. He had certainly been playing in luck, he told himself gloatingly. And, what was still better, nobody could point an accusing finger at him.

But for all that he decided that, everything considered, it was about time for him to return south.

He packed all his stuff into his sleigh a few days later, but before he laid a definite course homeward he paid a visit to Nathan Otter.

He poured into the ears of the dumbfounded and terrified Mr. Otter a detailed account of what he had seen from the ridge that day, and further went on to explain, with a sorrowful shake of his head, how inconsiderately the police were wont to treat murderers. However, he continued, he was not the kind of man who liked to get other fellows into trouble, but, on the other hand, he was a man with a tender conscience, and a struggling fellow with his living to make, and . . . In short, he finally hinted that for a consideration he might be able to still the clamour of his sensitive conscience and forget all about the affair. And poor Nathan was so demoralized that he did not even protest when he heard the material equivalence of that consideration. And Charley finally left the disturbed Nathan poorer by furs to the value of about two hundred dollars, but richer by Charley's pledged word that he would keep strictly to himself what he knew.

Of course Charley knew that he could have struck a more profitable bargain, but he did not like to press Nathan Otter so far that the latter might be roused to such a pitch of desperation that he might do something which would

utterly spoil Charley's game. And besides, Charley decided sagely, if he showed some leniency he would be able to call upon Nathan some other time when he needed a hand. And if Nathan should prove inclined to be stubborn, a deft twist of the screw would soon put matters right.

As soon as his interview with Nathan Otter was over, Charley laid a course for home, feeling very pleased with the results of his northern expedition. He went straight into Prince Albert and sold his pelts, and was now a man with money in his pockets. Consequently he could give himself up to his favourite pastimes, loafing and feeding well. But he took good care not to share his opulence with anybody else.

For the rest of that winter and the following spring and summer Charley led an about ideal existence from his point of view. But with the arrival of fall he discovered, to his great annoyance, that his money had dwindled considerably faster than he liked, and he reluctantly decided to do something about it.

He consequently proceeded to his trapping camp, and endeavoured to prop up his crumbling fortunes during the following trapping season. But he was not wildly successful. He had never been popular with his own tribe before, but after his trip north he found himself downright unpopular. Rumours had drifted down from the Beaver Lake district, and Charley judged it prudent to step warily. And, consequently, he found himself rather handicapped. But with what he had still got left of his money, plus the proceeds of the trapping, he managed to carry on through spring and summer, though the magnificence of the preceding year was a thing of the past.

He therefore gave serious thought to how to swell his depleted exchequer, and he finally decided that he had evolved a brilliant scheme. He knew something about horses and teaming, and he made up his mind to get a

job at one of the lumber-camps as a teamster during the coming season. He knew the lumber firms paid from eighty to ninety dollars a month and found, and he figured that at the end of the season he would be some five hundred dollars to the good, which would mean another spell of luxurious living. And sitting driving a team could hardly be considered heavy work, he thought optimistically. So, as soon as fall came, he sold his dogs to avoid the expense of feeding them while they were a total loss, went into Prince Albert, and got a job with Brandon's outfit. And as there was a shortage of lumber-hands that year he found himself the proud recipient of eighty-five dollars monthly.

But as soon as he had started work at the lumber-camp he found that he had grossly underestimated the hardships involved in his job. Much to his chagrin, he found that his was not merely the task of sitting in state on a sleigh chirping to a team of horses, but he was also called upon to handle heavy logs till the muscles were about cracking under the strain. And Charley found it almost insulting to expect a man of his ease-loving temperament to partake in such strenuous exercise. But as he found no sympathy with his views on the subject, and as the pay was tempting, he decided to stick it out for as long as he could stand it.

Then came the quarrel and fight between Brandon and Turner, and Charley immediately thought he saw a way of making a pile of easy money. Being an observant gentleman, he knew the routine of the camp to perfection, and he knew that, regularly as a clockwork, Dave Brandon went to Prince Albert for the pay-roll on the last day of every month, returning the following day. He had often given serious thought to the matter of how to get hold of that fat roll, but so far he had not been able to hit on any safe, sound scheme. But now, after the fracas and Turner's extravagant threats against Brandon, he thought he could see daylight.

He thought the whole thing over for a few days, and, having laid his scheme, he went to Brandon and asked for his time on the plea of illness.

After Langren had dropped him in town he went to the lumber firm and cashed the order Brandon had given him, and after that he bought five dogs and a sleigh, and stocked the sleigh with provisions and dog-feed sufficient for about a month or so.

Bright and early in the morning of the last day but one of the month he started up the Lac la Ronge trail. At a certain locality he had in mind he turned the dogs off the trail and headed them into the woods. He walked ahead breaking trail, and the dogs followed with the heavy sleigh. After having travelled this way for about a couple of miles they arrived in a small clearing near a frozen creek, and Charley called a halt and prepared camp.

He built a cache up in a tree, and piled most of his provisions and the dog-harness up there; then he built a big fire, and made a spruce-mat for himself alongside. He spent the night in that camp, but early on the following morning, after a hasty breakfast, he made a pack out of his bedding and some provisions and cooking-utensils, slung it on his back, grabbed his rifle and snow-shoes, and walked quickly back to the main trail the way he had come. When he arrived on the trail he listened intently to hear if any dog-teams were astir on the road, though he knew that would be unlikely at this early hour. But some fool might blunder along, of course. Finally he decided that the coast was clear, and he walked rapidly southward to a point about three miles down. There he hurriedly donned his snow-shoes and struck into the woods, taking a direction which would carry him to the trail leading to Brandon's camp.

Being an expert woodsman, he finally struck the camp-trail very near the spot he had been aiming for. This being the last of the month he walked up to the trail and examined it, and, as he had expected, there were the fresh

tracks of horses and a sleigh going in to town, so evidently Brandon was keeping to schedule.

Having satisfied himself that there had been no alteration in the programme, Charley walked alongside the trail up to a certain point where the road made a sharp curve around some brush. He carefully looked the place over, and decided that it was well adapted for his purpose.

His reconnaissance finished to his satisfaction, he turned back into the woods and found a camping-place far enough back to prevent his fire from being seen by anybody passing along the trail. He built himself a fire, made a thick spruce-mat, and loafed in comfort, his only exertion being to haul wood for his fire and cook his meals.

He felt satisfied with the course of events thus far. His dogs had been well fed before he left them, so they would in all likelihood spend their time in sleep and comfortable laziness till he returned, and would hardly advertise their existence to any curious-minded traveller on the main trail. It would be very awkward if anybody should find his camp up there while he was away. But that was a risk he had to take, though it was minimal. Those who passed on the trail were generally too busy about their own affairs to nose into other people's.

The following forenoon, shortly before noon, Charley rolled up his stuff and left the camp with his rifle, leaving his ready-made pack behind. He knew Brandon would hardly pass on his way back before well into the afternoon, but he did not want to take any chances.

Once more back on the camp-trail he began to make his preparations, which were short and simple. He felled a spruce-tree across the trail, effectively blocking it just round the bend, where it could not be seen by anybody coming from Prince Albert before they were right on top of it. Charley felt quite positive in his own mind that there would be no other travellers along that trail but Brandon. The men at camp would have no reason to go to town when Brandon had already gone there, and as the trail

stopped at the camp, nobody used it except people having business out there. And business visits were few and far between, he knew well, and to-day, with Brandon in town, Charley knew there would be none.

All Charley had to do now was to wait till the foreman came along, which was quite trying considering the icy temperature, in spite of Charley's caribou-coat and hood. He tramped up and down behind the spruce which he had picked as his place of concealment, and cursed the necessity for this disagreeable wait.

At last he suddenly ceased his ambulations and cocked an ear down the trail. After having listened carefully for a few moments, a grin of satisfaction spread across his face. He had heard the faint, distant chimes of horse-bells.

He at once took up his post behind the spruce-tree, and waited with rifle ready.

Nearer and nearer sounded the bells, and soon he could hear the muffled sound of hoof-beats on the snow. Now they were just around the bend, and Charley shook the fur mitten off his right hand and tensed himself.

Presently the two horses rounded the bend, coming at a smooth trot, only to slide to a jerky stop when they discovered the obstacle across their path.

"What the hell!" ejaculated the surprised Brandon, who had nearly been jostled out of his seat by the sudden stop.

At that moment Charley's rifle cracked, and Brandon toppled out of the sleigh on to the trail, dead before he reached the ground. Charley's aim had been true, and his bullet had gone straight through Brandon's head.

The two horses, terrified by the explosion, reared and plunged, trying frantically to jump over the obstacle, but Charley paid no attention to them. He rushed over to Brandon's body, bent over him and hurriedly patted his pockets. Quickly he pulled out the thick packet of bills he found buttoned up in the inside pocket of Brandon's coat, and he then hurriedly searched his other pockets,

but discovered that there was nothing of value left. Shoving the bills into his own pocket he hurried away, picking up the mitten from behind the spruce. Then he walked rapidly into the forest, leaving the maddened horses to shift for themselves.

Back in his temporary camp he slung the pack across his shoulders, and hurried back to the Lac la Ronge trail.

On the main trail once more he again listened intently, but could hear nothing which indicated that any traveller was near. He quickly removed his snow-shoes, slung them over his shoulder, and almost ran up the trail, prepared to dodge behind some tree if anybody should happen along. But he met nobody, and soon he was following the sleigh-tracks back to his camp, having first noticed to his great satisfaction that there were no tracks on that trail except his own from yesterday.

His dogs received him with a fit of barking. Evidently they found it about time for another feed. Hurriedly Charley cut some of the frozen fish he carried for dog-feed in two, and chucked the dogs a half-fish apiece. He had no time to bother about thawing them out, but the eager, crunching sounds coming from the dogs seemed to indicate that they were well satisfied.

In the meantime Charley quickly gathered his stuff from the cache, and packed it all in the sleigh. By the time he had finished the dogs had disposed of their meal, and Charley put them in harness and started them back over the trail they had broken two days ago.

When they reached the main trail Charley smiled his satisfaction. The heavy sleigh had quite wiped out the tell-tale double sets of tracks from his extra trip, and there was nothing which could now connect the occupant of his late camp with the snow-shoe tracks farther south. And as to camping so far from the trail, well, there was the creek as an explanation. Any investigator would merely think that whoever made that camp had wanted to camp near water instead of going through the annoying and slow

process of melting snow for his kettle. So Charley prided himself that he had acted very wisely and prudently throughout the affair.

He headed the dogs towards Lac la Ronge, and drove them hard till it was quite late. He camped in a clearing off the trail for the night, and early on the following morning he was on his way again, driving the dogs as fast as he dared. The next day he met a white trapper who was headed down the trail, but he pulled his hood well down over his face, drove his dogs to one side of the trail, and bent low over them as the trapper passed, as if he was restraining his growling team from picking a fight with the trapper's dogs. The trapper only gave him a short nod in passing, and Charley continued on his way, quite certain that the trapper had not discovered his identity even if he had seen him before, which was doubtful.

The following day he arrived at Lac la Ronge, and travelled straight through to his own camp. He had taken the precaution to time his arrival at such a late hour that nobody would be abroad. He had not the slightest desire to be observed. His time of departure from Prince Albert could easily be verified, and if anybody should be in the position to be able to check that with his time of arrival at Lac la Ronge, the result would decidedly be more than awkward. He was under no delusion as to his reputation, and if such a glaring discrepancy between his time of departure and his time of arrival were discovered, he knew it would cause comment, followed by suspicion as soon as the circumstances connected with Brandon's death were broadcast in a near future.

Charley's luck held, and he reached his camp in the deep of night without having been discovered by a soul. Chuckling to himself, he fished a lantern out of his sleigh, lighted it, and entered his shack. A rapid inspection showed him that everything was as he had left it, except that a few window-panes had been broken. But those he would attend to in the morning.

He collected some firewood and lit the stove. Next he unloaded his sleigh, and dumped the contents in one corner of the shack. The dogs were unharnessed and chained to trees near the shack, and with his axe he cut down a supply of spruce-boughs for his bunk. Having stuffed some pieces of cloth in the gaps in the window, he set some fish up against the stove to thaw, and began to prepare a meal for himself.

After having finished his meal and fed the dogs, he rolled himself in his blankets and lay for a while reviewing past events. He flattered himself that he had been extraordinarily smart.

First there was the quarrel between Brandon and Turner to throw suspicion on the latter. Perhaps Turner would be in a position to prove his innocence, perhaps not. If he could, it would be lucky for him, and if not, extremely unlucky. For his part Charley hoped that the latter alternative would be the case. That Turner in that case would have to pay with his life for a crime he had not committed did not bother Charley in the slightest. His regard for the value of human life, his own excepted, was less than minimal.

But whatever happened to Turner, his own position was perfectly safe, decided Charley. There was no reason at all why he should be suspected. He had never caused any trouble in Brandon's camp, had never uttered an unguarded word against Brandon, and above all, there were no tracks connecting his camp with the scene of the crime. And as nobody had witnessed the time of his arrival back at his camp, nobody could point an accusing finger at the excessive length of time he had required for his trip from Prince Albert to Lac la Ronge.

Finally Charley fell asleep, feeling very pleased with the world in general, and his own smartness in particular.

Charley had plenty of animal cunning, but his logical faculties did not measure up to his cunning, and consequently he had omitted to take several matters into

consideration. He had, for instance, completely discounted the tenacity of the police. It had not occurred to him that if they came to a blind alley in one direction, they would unhesitatingly and untiringly explore some new avenue. And before all would they inquire into the movements of any man who had had any connection with Brandon's camp, and who could not be accounted for around the time of the murder. And then Charley had almost completely forgotten to take into consideration the average woodsman's opinion of people of his race, which was that all Indians were a crowd of sly sneaks, who were likely to do anything. And as he had been the only Indian in Brandon's camp, and as he had left that camp shortly before the time of Brandon's murder, there should have been several points which ought to have given the self-satisfied Charley food for grave and serious reflections.

CHAPTER XI

CHARLEY CROW SEEKS A SANCTUARY

CHARLEY's first consideration the next day was to establish a trap-line. Not that he was particularly keen on bothering about trapping, but it was essential to make his sojourn at his camp appear natural. And the sooner he started the better. Any day some moose-hunter or somebody might blunder along, and he had to have his line going by then, or otherwise curiosity and conjecture would be the unavoidable results. But, he decided, it was to be a short one: just long enough to be comfortably covered in one day.

He loaded some grub and some traps in his sleigh, hitched up his dogs, and set out. Even though necessity forced him to uncongenial toil, he was at least going to reduce exertions to a minimum. And he made the firm resolve that he would lay his line through such country that he could patrol the whole line sitting comfortably in his sleigh.

For a little over a week Charley carried on with his half-hearted attempts at trapping, and he soon had a few skins hanging on his wall; just sufficient to prove his *bona fide* to any visitor.

He also worked up enough energy to board up the gaps in his window with bits from a box which he broke up. There were also a few cracks between the logs here and there which ought to be attended to, but as the weather remained fine and clear, and as none of the cracks

were directly over his bunk, they did not discommode him particularly, so he postponed fixing them from day to day. Anyhow, he had decided not to remain buried in that shack longer than was strictly necessary.

Now he was the proud possessor of more than two thousand dollars in cash he had begun to get ambitious dreams. He knew that some of the free-traders made quite good money, and he had made up his mind that as soon as it was safe to move about freely again, he would buy an outfit and try his hand at trading up north somewhere. In a few days now he would take a trip in to the settlement and try to pick up some news. They would know all about Brandon's death down there by this time, and would also probably know what the police were doing about it.

One afternoon Charley was returning leisurely to his camp. When he still had about a half-mile to go, he suddenly discovered that his dogs were sniffing the air suspiciously, and presently the leader began to growl, while the hair began to stand up on its back.

Quickly Charley jumped out of the sleigh, turned the dogs around, and drove them back the way they had just come. The actions of the dogs had warned Charley that ahead, most likely at his own camp, was somebody or something which should not be there. And the suspicious Charley decided to find out what that something or somebody was before he made known his presence. He was glad he had managed to stop his team in time, just before the dogs began to bark.

Having placed a good mile between him and his camp, Charley judged it safe to leave the dogs while he slipped forward alone to reconnoitre. He ran the team behind a small hill, and tied the dogs up to a tree. He then grabbed his rifle and walked carefully back towards his camp, often stopping to listen suspiciously. The nearer he got to his cabin the more stealthy became his progress, and a fox could not have sneaked more noiselessly up to the fringe of the forest than he did.

Safely ensconced behind a spruce he took a survey of his camp through the screening brush, and what he saw made his face wrinkle up with rage and fury. In front of the entrance to his shack stood a dog-sleigh, and before the sleigh, in their harness, lay a team of dogs, all rolled up, comfortably snoozing. There was a certain trimness and smartness over the whole outfit which made him guess quickly at the status of the invisible driver.

A streamer of smoke coming from the stove-pipe sticking out through the roof of the shack indicated the present whereabouts of the missing owner of the dog-train, and Charley had a presentiment that the owner was one of the hated red-coats. But if so, how had he got on Charley's track so soon? Charley again ran quickly over in his mind past events, but could find no point where he had shown any carelessness or dropped any clue. And the trail between his camp and the place where he had waylaid Brandon was so well broken that it was impossible to follow. So how in the name of everything had the police got there?

He thought he could guess at the answer. Probably some accursed sneak had seen him and had recognized him, either when he sneaked up to or returned from the ambush, or perhaps at the ambush itself. And then the saturated son of sin and Satan of a spy had gone off and reported to the police what he had seen. That was the only explanation he could offer. But that was all of minor interest.

The important point was: what on earth was he to do? He had not the slightest idea of surrendering to the police, but how to avoid it? Of course, he could return to his dogs and light out, but he had no grub and no bedding on his sleigh, and he could not go far without them. Especially as under the circumstances he dare not show himself near any trading-post. He simply had to have his outfit, but how was he to get hold of it as long as that — red-coat was standing guard over it? If he first got hold of his outfit he knew what he would do. He would streak

up to Beaver Lake and get Nathan Otter to hide him. Up in that district of hills, ridges and draws there were quite a few abandoned shacks which were well hidden, and Nathan would be certain to know of some that could be of use to him as a hiding-place. And Nathan would, of course, not dare refuse, seeing Charley knew what he knew. And once safely hidden up there he could form a plan about how he was to slip clean out of the country to some place far removed from the sphere of snooply busy-bodies in scarlet tunics.

But how to get his outfit?

Before he laid any definite plan he had to find out for certain who was actually inside his shack. Perhaps it was not a member of the police at all, but some fellow from one of the fur companies he thought in sudden optimism. He could sneak right up to the shack on the "blind" side, and he knew of a crack near the corner where he could get a clear view of the inside.

He circled around the clearing to a point where he would be out of sight to the dogs, and then advanced as alertly as a cat, and as softly, feeling sincerely thankful that the snow lay deep right up to that side of the shack, so that no treacherous creak of moccasins against hard snow could betray his movements.

At last he reached the corner and cautiously put an eye to the crack, and forthwith his worst fears were verified. On the chair in front of the stove, with legs stretched out and hands in his breeches-pockets, sat a policeman.

A wave of cold fury swept over Charley at the sight, but he soon got himself under control. Something had to be done, and done quickly.

He noticed that the policeman was sitting with his back to the window, and that he looked as if he was quite off his guard and half asleep.

Charley pondered deeply. If he could get to the window without being heard, he could shoot the policeman where he sat, get his stuff and clear out. Most likely

several days and more would pass by before the body was discovered, so he, Charley, would have enough of a start to get to Beaver Narrows and safety well ahead of any pursuit. It was the only way out of a desperate situation that he could see.

Having made up his mind, he crept warily along the gable end to the other side of the shack, taking good care to step in soft snow only.

At last he came to a point where he could see the policeman through the window. He still sat in the same position as before, obviously unsuspecting of danger.

Smoothly and quickly Charley lifted his rifle to his shoulder, took careful aim, and fired.

Through the swirling smoke he could see the policeman crumple up where he sat, topple sideways, and crash to the floor.

Startled by the report, the dogs started up and began to bark furiously. But Charley did not bother about the dogs just then. He sprinted to the door, tore it open, and burst into the shack, his rifle ready. But one look at the body assured him that he had nothing more to fear from that quarter. The bullet had hit the back of the head squarely, and the policeman must have been killed instantly.

Charley now turned his attention to the madly barking dogs.

"Shut up, you!" he yelled furiously in his native tongue. He was anxious lest the uproar should attract some roamer on to the scene.

But the dogs refused to shut up.

With an oath Charley ejected the spent shell from his rifle and jammed a fresh cartridge into the magazine. Then he raised his rifle, and, one by one, he deliberately shot the dogs, each of the five cartridges in the magazine accounting for one.

"Now you'll be quiet, perhaps!" he snarled.

But he could not afford to waste any time, so he started

back on a run to where he had left his own dogs, and hurried them back to the shack.

Without paying any further notice to the body on the floor, he bundled all his stuff into his sleigh in frantic haste.

At last he had finished, and he left the shack. As he was about to pull the door shut after him he paused, then he smiled evilly, and pushed the door wide open.

"I'll give the wolves a chance to get at you," he muttered, looking at the body. "That will be just what you deserve, you —— of a sneaking red-coat!"

Having bestowed this pious benediction on the dead man, he walked over to his dogs. But just as he was about to start them he paused once more. He had got a fresh idea. A scheme had just occurred to him by which he could cover up his tracks effectively and confuse any pursuit. Carrying out the scheme would mean a delay of several valuable minutes, and it involved the risk that some possible roamer, who had heard the shots and the uproar from the dogs, might come along to investigate. But, he decided callously, if any meddler should blunder along, he would dispose of him like he had disposed of the red-coat.

Hurriedly he dragged the dead dogs and the sleigh inside the cabin. Next he brought his whole stack of firewood inside and piled it on top of the dead officer and the dogs. Finally he took a can of coal-oil from his sleigh, poured generous quantities of the contents over the firewood, and splashed more oil up the walls and on the floor of the cabin. Then he lit a match, touched it here and there, and with a roar the coal-oil caught fire. Charley had barely time to jump back before the whole inside of the shack was a roaring sheet of flames.

Chuckling to himself, he started his dogs towards the fringe of the forest. There he waited for a while to make quite sure that there would be no hitch in the programme. But there was no need for him to worry. The logs in the

shack were well seasoned and dried, and soon the little building was a roaring furnace.

"He-he," chuckled Charley, feeling very pleased with himself. "When that fire has burnt itself out there won't be anybody who will know what happened to that accursed red-coat. They will think he is chasing me all over the country. When they miss him at last, they won't know where to look for him. And by that time I'll be so well hidden that the whole bunch of them won't be able to find me. They won't even know in what direction to look. And in the spring they will about have forgotten all about me, so it will be easy for me to slip out of the country, if I'm only a little careful."

Still grinning, he started his dogs into the woods, heading straight north.

He had to break trail for his dogs, but as it was a long time since the last snowfall, and as the old snow had settled fairly firmly, the job was not extremely hard. So they were able to push ahead at a fairly good speed. Anyhow, Charley knew that only a few miles farther north he would strike a firm trail which led to the main trail farther west, and on those trails the going would be excellent.

About two hours later he was hurrying his dogs up the trail leading to Beaver Narrows. He did not expect to meet any travellers before the trail joined the road between Portage Bend and Beaver Narrows. Most people from up that part of the country preferred the better and shorter trail into Portage Bend when they were going south. Of course there was a chance of accidental meetings, but that had to be risked. His one and only concern just at present was pushing ahead as fast as his dogs could go. As soon as he got on to the Beaver Narrow-Portage Bend road, he would have to show more caution. There were a lot of side-trails branching off from the main trail up there, and if he avoided being seen on the main road, possible pursuers would be at a loss to know which

trail he had chosen. And once safely up in the Beaver Lake district, he should, by the aid of Nathan Otter, certainly make himself hard to find.

He pushed rapidly ahead, allowing himself and his dogs an absolute minimum of rest and sleep, and luck seemed to favour him. He met no travellers. The woods appeared as empty of life as if he had them all to himself.

When he finally reached the Portage Bend-Beaver Narrows trail, he changed his tactics. The time honest travellers began a new day's journey, Charley pushed into the woods, away from the main trail, and lay well hidden till dusk came. Then, when the snow-owls began to hoot in the woods, and the light of camp-fires began to cast their ruddy light around, Charley started out, travelling along the dark, deserted trail as fast as he could move. He had no bells on his harness, and as soon as he saw the tell-tale glow of a camp-fire ahead, he pushed past as quietly as possible. Of course at several camps the dogs broke the brooding silence of the night by voicing their protest against this late travelling, but Charley passed too quickly for any curious eyes to establish his identity.

After two weeks' hard travel he arrived at Beaver Lake, and his further progress became more stealthy than ever. He carefully avoided the trading post and settlement at Beaver Narrows, and took a circuitous road to Nathan Otter's trapping camp. He knew he would find Nathan there this time of the season.

It was around midnight when Charley crept cautiously up to Nathan's cabin to look the place over. He had left his dogs back in the woods.

He found dogs chained to trees in the clearing, so obviously the camp was occupied. But he knew that Nathan had another shack a day's travel along his trapping-line, and Nathan might, of course, be in that other shack. But he hoped not. In that case it would be necessary for him to hide in the woods till Nathan returned sometime towards evening on the following day,

and that would be awkward. Some roamer might blunder across him, and that was the last thing he wanted to happen now he had got so far without having been observed.

He crossed the open clearing and made for the shack. The wary dogs discovered his presence and began to bark, but that did not bother him. Dogs often have fits of barking at night, so the fact would hardly excite any suspicion and curiosity among the inmates of the cabin.

He crept right up to the door, and laid an ear against it. He heard the breathing of several people inside, and he nodded his head. Nathan would have his wife and family with him.

He raised his fist and knocked on the door. The snores and heavy breathing inside stopped, and a sleepy female voice asked in Cree:

"Who is it?"

"Is Nathan Otter in there?" asked Charley.

"Yes. Who wants me?" came Nathan's voice, and Charley drew a deep breath of relief.

"A friend," he explained. "Come out, Nathan. I want to have a few words with you."

"Come right in. The door is not barred."

"I don't want to come in. I want to see you out here," persisted Charley.

"Well, tell me who you are."

"Never mind my name. I am a friend down from the south who saw something up here a couple of years ago," was the only explanation Charley vouchsafed, but to Nathan it was illuminating.

He smothered a curse and hurriedly donned the clothes he had discarded before rolling up in his blankets—which were few. He was in an agony of apprehension. He had thought the voice was familiar from the first, and Charley's sketchy explanation had verified his suspicions. What by all that was accursed was Charley Crow up to now? And why had he come around in this furtive

manner? he asked himself. Something was up; something pretty ugly at that, he felt convinced.

To his wife's curious query he snapped a command to be quiet, and not to strike a light, and he hastily pulled on his caribou-coat and walked to the door. He cautiously opened it, and peered out into the dark night. He thought he saw a shadow against the snow a few yards off, and he slipped out, closing the door behind him.

"That you, Charley?" he whispered.

"Yes," came the guarded answer. "Come over to the edge of the wood, I want to speak to you."

"Well?" asked Nathan, when they had gained the shelter of the trees.

"I am in trouble," explained Charley. "The police is after me, and I want your help to find a place to hide."

"What have you done?" asked Nathan. He was surly and suspicious.

"Nothing," answered Charley, "but they think I have done something. I was working at a lumber-camp down near Prince Albert, and the foreman was shot and killed by someone. And I got blamed for it. I was the only Indian in that camp, and you know yourself, Nathan, that when there is any trouble, we Indians always get blamed for it," complained Charley with touching pathos. "But I managed to give the police the slip, and now I want to go into hiding till this blows over. Perhaps I'll try to slip out of the country in the spring, when my tracks can't be followed."

Charley discreetly forebore to mention anything about Corporal Connor's subsequent death. He felt rather proud of the cleverness he had displayed in extricating himself from a decidedly tight corner, but even so, he decided to keep his triumph strictly to himself. He shrewdly suspected that if Nathan heard that there was an additional killing of a red-coat involved in his flight, the latter might get too alarmed to dare render any assistance.

Nathan had listened to Charley's explanation of the

unjust accusation preferred against him in non-committal silence. He had his own ideas about the truth of the matter, but he thought it unwise to put them into words.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" he asked.

"I want you to pick out some abandoned shack, which is well hidden away, and with no people anywhere near. And then I want you to help me get to it."

"I don't know if I dare help you," answered Nathan, after having turned the matter over in his mind for a few moments. "If I do, I might get into trouble with the red-coats myself."

"There is no danger about that. I have thrown the police off my track completely, so they don't know where to look for me. And remember, you will get into worse trouble if you do not help me," remarked Charley significantly.

"That may be so, and then again it may not be so. I may tell the police that I did not kill that trapper, but that you did, and that you are trying to put the blame on me because I refused to help you," observed Nathan reflectively.

"You know they would not believe that," scoffed Charley. "Why should I go ahead and tell them about a killing they know nothing about if I had done it myself? That would hardly be reasonable. You are talking foolish, Nathan." Charley smiled cynically, a *beau geste* which was unfortunately wasted in the darkness.

"Perhaps. But I could tell them the truth, that I killed the white man in a quarrel, when he was threatening to attack me. Then they would do nothing worse than maybe give me a few months in prison," continued Nathan.

"But you are forgetting that I'll be giving evidence," remarked Charley significantly. "And perhaps I tell them I saw you kill the white man, and that he was doing nothing to you."

"And you would do that after I have given you two hundred dollars' worth of furs, because you promised to

say nothing about it?" There was shocked reproach in Nathan's voice.

"I should not like to do it, Nathan," said Charley deprecatingly. "But you can't expect me to back you up when you let me down."

The two were silent for some minutes after this preliminary skirmish. They were both thinking deeply.

Nathan Otter, for his part, had a wholesome dread of the mounted police, and he had a firm suspicion that no good would come out of any attempt to thwart them. He knew that their persistence was distressingly untiring, and that they generally gained their object in the end. And then disagreeable experiences invariably awaited those who had been on the other side of the fence. On the other hand, there was that killing of the white trapper. So far nobody had suspected foul play. The trapper had been missed in due course; his shack had been found to be apparently intact; a search had been organized by the police, but had been abandoned as no traces could be found of the missing man. The popular supposition was that he had accidentally been killed somewhere in the woods, and that the wolves or foxes had finished him off. So Nathan had felt quite secure, and had by now almost forgotten the incident. And then Charley Crow, who had been an eye-witness to the affair, had to turn up and place the alternatives before him: either almost certain trouble with the police sooner or later for helping a fugitive from justice, or else immediate exposure of the true circumstances surrounding that trapper's death, which would mean still worse trouble.

Nathan was thoroughly disgusted. As far as he could see, trouble was pointing his way, whichever way he turned. So he frantically tried to think of some way out.

Charley, on the other hand, was reflecting that evidently his hold on Nathan was not quite as strong as he had imagined. So he was searching his mind for further weighty arguments which would more forcefully bring

Nathan's precarious position home to him. But before Charley had properly managed to marshall his forces of logic, Nathan had a brain-wave, and voiced it promptly.

"I think I have better go straight to the police myself, and tell them the whole truth about the killing of that white trapper," he announced, pardonable triumph in his voice. "If I confess first, and tell them you saw it all, but took pay to keep your mouth shut, they won't believe you if you tell another story.

Charley felt abused and scandalized. He had put Nathan down as an ordinary fool with a negligible quantity of brains, and now he found, to his chagrin, that Nathan was a fellow who could reason well enough to find the loophole in his tangled position.

Charley did not answer at once. He knew that the way the situation had developed he had to proceed very carefully. His thoughts raced over every trail, trying to find arguments with which to strengthen his hand. He considered informing Nathan that he was minded to take a chance and go straight off to the police and tell them his version of the affair between Nathan and the white trapper, before Nathan had time to get in his own confession, but he speedily abandoned the idea. Nathan might call his bluff. Of course, Nathan did not know how desperate Charley's own position was, but at the same time Charley had a shrewd suspicion that Nathan had not received his previous innocuous explanation of his own plight with any exaggerated faith. And to threaten Nathan with physical violence was also out of the question. He would gladly have killed Nathan if it had suited his purpose, but, unfortunately, he had to enlist Nathan's services in finding a hiding-place. He knew of no other who might be persuaded or coerced into helping him. And to roam farther along was out of the question. The country farther north was quite unknown to him, and he would be caught almost immediately. And to return would be suicide.

Finally Charley decided that he would have to alter his tactics. He would strike the sentimental strings a little, coupled with a few suggestions which would arouse the cupidity which Charley felt convinced was the leading trait in the average human.

"Well, Nathan," he said, a note of pathos in his voice, "I never thought you would let me down this way. We people of the same race and blood ought to stick together and help each other out, especially against the white people, who are always oppressing us and robbing us. Did I not help you out when you were in trouble? Did I not promise not to give you away, and have I not faithfully kept that promise?" The last sentences he delivered with quite some emotion.

"Yes," admitted Nathan a little uneasily, "but it cost me two hundred dollars to make you help me."

"Well, and do you think I'm asking you to help me for nothing?" asked Charley, his voice expressing surprise at such an extraordinary delusion on Nathan's part. "I have got plenty of money, and can pay my way. I have enough to see to it that those who prove my friends will not lose on it."

This put an entirely different complexion on the whole matter as far as Nathan was concerned. One of his chief objections against getting involved in Charley's affair, apart from his dread of the police, which was quite honest, had been a suspicion that Charley was penniless, and that he, Nathan, would be called upon to look after finances. And that was a matter which was almost as relishable to him as serving a stretch in gaol. But if Charley was opulent, it would be quite worth while taking a few risks. Charley had gauged Nathan's character fairly correctly.

"Well, of course, we fellows ought to stand by each other," said Nathan slowly, after a few thoughtful moments. "And I think I can help you. I know of a place that would just suit you. But I'm a man with a family to keep, so I don't dare take too many risks. How

much did you figure on paying me for my troubles and risks? ”

“The same as you paid me, two hundred dollars,” announced Charley. It was a wrench, but the desperate situation demanded a sacrifice on his part, he felt.

“Well, now,” said Nathan reflectively, “I think you ought to pay more than that, because I’m taking heavy risks. You took no risks in my case. All you had to do was to keep your mouth shut, and nobody could blame you, whatever happened. But if you get caught in spite of everything, they’ll soon find out that I helped you, and then I’ll get into bad trouble. So I think you ought to pay me three hundred.”

Charley fairly bubbled with internal rage at this demand, and he had to struggle hard with himself to keep his fury from boiling over. But he knew he was in no position to bargain. And besides, he reflected, it was his life which was at stake, and money would be of little use to him if dead. And they were losing valuable time over this wrangling. He wanted to get safely to a hiding-place as quickly as possible. So he capitulated, but he made the firm promise to himself that he would see to it that the matter was adjusted some time in the future.

“I did not think you would treat a friend this way, Nathan,” he said reproachfully. “But I won’t haggle. I’ll pay you a hundred and fifty as soon as you have got me to that hiding-place, and the rest before I leave the country.”

Nathan considered the proposal, and finally found it all right. He knew it would be impossible for Charley to get away without his aid, and he would take good care that the aid would not be forthcoming without the prompt delivery of the outstanding balance.

“I agree,” he said, holding out his hand, and the bargain was sealed.

“Where is this place you have in mind?” asked Charley.

"It is a shack in a ravine, about ten miles to the south of the other end of my trap-line. It used to belong to some prospectors who were up here some years ago, looking for gold. But as they didn't find enough worth working they cleared out again. There are no people near that part of the district. It is all broken country, and no use for trapping. And the moose seldom goes in there, but keeps to the open country farther west, so you won't be bothered by any hunters. I was over to the shack sometime in the fall, and it is in quite good shape. Some of the glass in the window is broken, but you can soon fix that. And there is a small cooking-stove which is good enough to use. We can get to it by noon to-morrow if we start right away."

"That sounds good," remarked Charley. "But I am short of food. I have only got enough for another week or so. Could you let me have some?"

"Uhu. I can sell you some," answered Nathan, slightly stressing the word "sell." "I can let you have enough bacon, flour, coffee, frozen moose-meat and such-like, sufficient to last you two months or so. I can also give you a load of fish for your dogs. I can send my wife in to the store and get a fresh supply as soon as I get back."

"Good. I'll go and get my dogs, and drive them up in front of your shack. I'm not coming in. It is better that nobody sees me. And be sure to tell your family that they have better forget all about any visitor to-night."

"Uhu," grunted Nathan, and the two separated. Charley strode into the woods, and Nathan walked back to his cabin.

When Nathan entered his shack his family evinced a not unnatural curiosity with regard to the mysterious visitor and his long absence, but Nathan informed them curtly that they had to forget all about the visitor and any other incident of that night, or else it might mean serious trouble for him, he added. And he knew his dictum would be scrupulously adhered to by all. He

went on to say that he was leaving immediately with the visitor, and that he would not be back for twenty-four hours or so; and further, that he was going to surrender most of their provisions to the stranger. But, he added, he would have plenty of money when he returned, and then his wife could run in to the store at Beaver Narrows and buy all they needed, and a few things over. And at this pleasing piece of information there was great rejoicing in the cabin.

Nathan lighted a lantern, but gave strict injunctions to his family to remain inside the shack till he and the stranger had left.

Soon Charley arrived with his team, and the provisions, which Nathan had collected in the meantime, were hurriedly packed in the sleigh.

Nathan then put the lantern back in the shack, reminded his family of what he had told them, and then the two started off, Nathan going in front to show the way in the dark. Only a few days previously Nathan had gone over his trapping-line with his own team, so the trail was fair, and they could travel fairly fast.

The grey dawn was beginning to herald the arrival of the new day when Nathan called a halt. The trail was running along a valley between two low, spruce-clad ridges.

"This is where we turn off," he announced. "We have to cross that ridge to our right into a valley on the other side, which runs south-east for six or seven miles. Down at the lower end of that valley a narrow ravine cuts down through the hills from the east, and a few miles up that ravine the shack is located."

Charley pondered for a while.

"I don't want to lay a sleigh-trail across that ridge," he said presently. "If the police should blunder around they would look for sleigh-tracks; and if they found a sleigh-trail leading across that ridge, they might get suspicious and look into it. But snow-shoe tracks, cutting off from

a trapping-line, are quite usual, and would not make anyone suspicious. We'll pack all the stuff, the sleigh, and the dogs across that ridge into the valley on the other side, then there won't be any sleigh-tracks to make people curious. It won't be more than a mile or so across, I suppose?"

"About that," answered Nathan, frowning. He did not quite relish the idea of carrying all the stuff for a mile, especially as half of the way was uphill, but he had to admit the soundness of Charley's argument. "Perhaps it will snow in a few days' time," he continued, "and then the snow will cover up the tracks, anyhow. It hasn't been snowing for a long time now, so we are about due for a storm."

"Perhaps. But I'm not going to take any chances, so we have better do it my way," insisted Charley.

Nathan growled a surly acquiescence, and they at once set to work.

After about an hour's hard toil they had freighted everything across the ridge. The dogs had shown some indignation at this novel way of travelling, but any signs of mutiny had been firmly quelled at the outset.

"As soon as we get to a place with plenty of dry wood, I'm going to boil a kettle and have some food," growled Charley as they started down the valley. "I have hardly had anything to eat since noon yesterday, so I'm all empty inside."

"I am hungry myself," admitted Nathan. "I know of a good place a couple of miles ahead. We'll eat there. Now you go ahead and break trail. Straight down the valley, along this hill to our right."

The day was cold, but calm. The sun had risen above the tree-tops, and was shedding its light over the forest and snow, so that even the dark, brooding spruce-trees looked almost jovial, while the snow glittered and winked merrily.

But the smiling mood of nature struck no chord in the

two men who were toiling down the valley. Their tempers were quite a bit too frayed and ragged for that. Even a substantial breakfast before a roaring fire failed to sweeten their somewhat acid dispositions to any marked degree. Their progress was slow on account of trail-breaking and the heavy sleigh, which fact added further gloom to their mental outlook.

Finally, shortly after noon, they reached the ravine—a deep, brush-covered gash in a high hill.

They turned into it, following a narrow opening through the brush which marked the course of a brook hidden below the snow and ice.

Now their real, hard work began. The ravine sloped rather steeply upwards, and frequently they both had to assist the dogs by pushing behind the heavy sleigh, which often got tangled in the brush on each side of the narrow passage. As soon as the sleigh was clear, one of them had to go ahead and break trail again; and slowly they snailed their way upwards.

At last they came to a point where the ravine widened, and formed a level basin where a flat, open stretch in the centre marked the location of a pond. On the left-hand side of the basin, near the edge of the spruce-forest, which swept up the steep wall of the ravine right to the top of the ridge above, stood a log shack.

"Here we are," announced Nathan with a sigh of relief.

Charley looked about him with interest.

"Does anybody know about this shack?" he asked.

"I don't think anybody knows about it but myself," answered Nathan. "I discovered it by accident three winters ago. I was down that valley we came along to see if it was worth while setting some traps down that way, when I discovered some fresh snow-shoe tracks. As I didn't know I had any neighbours so near my line, I went to find out who they were. I followed the tracks to this shack, and I found two white prospectors here.

They told me they had come up by canoe from the south-east, and as they didn't want to be bothered by any other prospectors, they had kept quiet about where they were going. They had come up in the fall, and were going back in the spring the same way they had come, they told me. They gave me ten dollars to keep my mouth shut about them. Either the stuff they found was no good, or else they are both dead, for they have never been back since. They left a table, some chairs and some other stuff behind, and I took all that over to my half-way shack last winter. I know none of those fellows went near the Narrows, so I feel quite certain that nobody knows of this shack beside me."

Charley grunted his satisfaction. They walked over to the shack, and Charley examined it critically. It was certainly not a palace, but it was quite serviceable. The door was still in place, and the hinges worked, though under creaking protest. Inside was a rusty, somewhat dilapidated small cooking-stove, which on closer examination proved to be still fit for use. Even the stove-pipes were in place all the way through the ceiling, with an extra length on the roof. The window boasted three or four small panes of glass, which were still intact, and the open gaps could speedily be covered up with bits of boarding from a packing-case.

All in all, in spite of several signs of decay and dilapidation, the shack could easily be made quite habitable. Of furniture there was none, but that did not bother Charley. He could cut a few logs and make himself a spruce bed, and then he was furnished with both bed and chair. Table he did not need, the floor would serve.

Charley was rather pleased with his retreat. Just now he was more concerned with safety than comfort, and this shack seemed to offer just the asylum he had been looking for.

"This looks all right," he announced. "Now just help me empty the sleigh and pile the stuff inside. After

that we'll eat, and then you have better return home. It would be wise if you do not stay away for too long."

Nathan nodded. Those were his sentiments exactly.

After they had emptied the sleigh and chained up the dogs, they collected some dry sticks and started a fire in the stove, which functioned surprisingly well.

After a quite substantial meal they lighted their pipes, and then Nathan pointedly broached the subject of finances. They wrangled a bit over the cost of the supplies Nathan had furnished, but Nathan won out. And in the end the disgusted Charley had to reduce his fat roll by twenty ten-dollar bills—the stipulated hundred and fifty plus an extra fifty for the supplies.

"Now, as soon as you hear any news, come and tell me," did Charlie instruct Nathan, when the latter was on the point of departing. "And leave your trap-line at some other place next time you come. No use to have too many tracks cutting out of the line at the same place. Anyhow, I hope it is going to snow in a week or so, and then all the old tracks will be wiped out."

"Uhu," grunted Nathan, wished Charley luck, and disappeared down the ravine.

He felt quite a little relieved in his mind as he tramped homewards because he had got Charley safely to his refuge, but he felt far from easy. But he knew Charley's retreat could only be found by accident, and he sincerely hoped that no accidents would happen while Charley was still there. One thing he was sincerely thankful for: nobody knew that he had ever had any dealings with Charley, so nobody could suspect him of being in league with him.

Occasionally his hand would stray up to his breast pocket, and when he felt the crisp crackling of bills under his hand, he felt that matters might have been far worse.

He made far better speed on his return trip, so he was back home at about ten o'clock that night. He had covered the whole distance in under eight hours, while

he and Charley had used more than eleven hours on the trip out, hampered as they had been by breaking trail and the heavily laden sleigh.

His family made no reference to the mysterious nightly visitor or to his trip. Nathan ate a hasty meal, and directly after he rolled himself into his blankets, quite tired out.

But on the following morning he made his partner in life open her eyes wide with wonder and joy when he pressed a sheaf of bills into her hand and told her to take the dogs and chase down to the Hudson's Bay Company's post at Beaver Narrows to buy provisions. He impressed on her to see to it that what she bought was all of the best quality, and, he added generously, if she wanted a few things for herself, she could buy them. He would have gone himself, only he had lost one day over his traps as it was, and he did not want to lose the additional four days on the trip to the post and back. The boy would have to keep house for the two girls during their parents' absence.

Mrs. Otter was soon mushing down the trail, rejoicing in her heart, while Nathan started out on a round of his line, hoping that, after all, everything would prove to be for the best.

CHAPTER XII

NATHAN OTTER IS WORRIED

No wonder that Nathan was bitterly cursing his luck as he hurried out to Charley Crow's hiding-place. As day had followed day and he had heard nothing about any inquiries having been instituted about Charley up around Beaver Lake, he had begun to lean towards the conviction that Charley had actually succeeded in throwing the police completely off his trail. And after the last blizzard had wiped out all tracks between his camp and Charley's refuge he felt almost happy. He had begun to hope that the three hundred dollars he was to receive for his services would eventually prove to be a mere gift, and he was therefore beginning to contemplate the world with more equanimity.

Consequently the unexpected visit of the police to his camp had come as a crushing blow, and the following interview had not helped to reassure him; just the opposite. Not alone had it transpired that the police evidently suspected him of having connection with Charley, but, what was far worse, they had made him a present of that staggering piece of information that Charley was suspected of having murdered a policeman. And the fact had made Nathan quake with terror inside. Precarious as his position had been before, he felt that it was now a hundred times worse.

Nathan knew full well that, relentless and untiring as the police pursued their duties, their dynamic energies assumed gigantic proportions when one of their own

comrades had been wantonly killed in the discharge of duty. He knew the police would sift every bit of country till they had found the offender, even if it should take them years, and that they would watch every trail so closely that it would be impossible for the fugitive to get through the cordon. And he was under no delusion as to what would happen to himself when Charley was eventually caught and it was proved that he had shielded him.

How he wished he could go to the police and tell them the truth. . . . But that was out of the question. He simply dared not do it. He knew what sort of story Charley would tell about the killing of that trapper, so it would be the same as tying the noose around his own neck. And it was too late now to go to the police and tell them the whole truth about that white man after he had actually helped Charley. They would hardly believe him, especially in view of Charley's conflicting evidence.

But he must find some way to extricate himself from his desperate situation.

He pondered deeply as he plodded along. At last he decided that the only way was to persuade Charley to leave that part of the country. Then there was a chance that he would not be implicated, even should Charley be caught. He would try to coax his dangerous associate to move into the wild, broken country to the east. Of course it would be impossible to slip in there without leaving a trail, but Nathan saw a scheme through which that difficulty could be overcome to a certain degree.

Charley would have to continue his flight on snowshoes, and would have to pack the supplies he needed. A snowshoe trail would very likely be overlooked, where a dog-trail simply would be begging for investigation. Charley would have to kill his dogs, bury them with his sleigh in some deep snowdrift, and wipe out all traces of the dogs around his camp. If that was done carefully,

anybody stumbling across that camp would merely think that some roaming hunter had been staying in the shack for a few days. And the man-hunters would hardly bother about the snow-shoe tracks. If the police had been actually trailing Charley, they would know that he had started out on his flight with five dogs, and it would appear more than unlikely that a desperate man, fleeing for his life, would abandon his dogs.

The more Nathan reviewed his plan the better he liked it. To him it appeared highly ingenious and eminently intelligent. And he hoped to be able to persuade Charley to take fondly to his brilliant brain-child.

Of course it was unfortunate that he had to make tracks out to Charley's camp now the snow was unbroken after the last snowfall, but that could not be helped. He would keep to hard snow as much as possible, where the imprints of snow-shoes would not show up plainly. He knew of a gap across the ridge, between his trapping-line and the valley leading down to the ravine, where the snow was always packed so firmly that snow-shoe tracks would hardly be seen at all. And if he kept to the middle of the valley he would be on firm snow most of the time. There was always a breeze sweeping along that valley, which hardened the surface of the snow sufficiently to carry a man on snow-shoes with ease. And in a few days the faint imprints of the snow-shoes would be completely obliterated by frost and drifting snow-grains.

In due course he came to the point where he was to leave his trapping-line, and he climbed quickly up the incline to the crest of the gap. There he stood for some moments and looked searchingly back towards his camp. He could plainly see the high hill behind his shack, but to his relief no smoke rose from it. Evidently the police had not returned as yet. Most likely they had really proceeded north as they had told him, but Nathan was suspicious these days.

Shortly after noon he began to near the lower end of

the valley and the ravine. Some miles north of the point where the ravine cut like a huge gash into the hill-side, Nathan paused and debated something in his mind for a few minutes. Then he turned abruptly sharply to his left, and shortly after he was climbing the spruce-clad hill-side. He was not going near the ravine before he had had a view back towards his camp from the hill-top. From the summit he could see all the way to the hill back of his camp, and he wanted to see if any warning fire had been lighted on that hill before he decided on his further course. If the fire was burning, he would give the ravine a wide berth and return to his trapping-line. And if anybody should ask any leading questions about his movements, he would simply state that he had been out looking for moose-tracks.

The slope was steep, and the hill was high, so Nathan's temper was severely frayed around the edges by the time he reached the crest. He felt uncomfortably hot in spite of the low temperature, and though an icy current from the north bit his face cruelly.

Cursing under his breath, he mounted a bare hump which rose sheer of the tree-tops, and he anxiously stared back towards home. There was no fire and no smoke, so with a sigh of relief he turned away and began to plod along the ridge towards the ravine.

When he got to the edge, right above Charley's cabin, he slipped over the rim and began the descent. The trees and brush screened him from observation till he reached the level, but as soon as he stepped into the open from the fringe of the forest surrounding the clearing, one of the dogs discovered him and raised the alarm, which was promptly taken up by the other dogs with great verve and energy.

Charley Crow had made himself as comfortable out in his refuge as circumstances and his constitutional indolence permitted. He had made himself a spruce-bed, had boarded up the gaps in the window, had driven some

brush into the worst chinks between the logs, and had collected a generous pile of firewood.

After these heroic activities followed days of unbroken ease and comfort. He had nothing else to do but sleep, smoke, prepare his food, and feed the dogs. He found conditions almost ideal. Plenty of grub, nothing to do, and money in his pocket. Of course it was regrettable that he had to remain coralled in this one place for the time being, but that inconvenience did not weigh very heavily on him.

He took for granted that he was quite safe in his retreat. He could not see how it could be otherwise. Even when that policeman was missed nobody would know where to look for either of them. And he felt certain that a long time would elapse before the red-coat would be missed. And the longer the time the more difficult it would be for the police to decide in which direction to push their inquiries. It would never have occurred to Charley in his wildest dreams that a woman's natural anxiety had already upset his calculations completely. Such a sentiment as worrying about the welfare of others was such a total stranger to him, that he never for one moment had taken it into account.

So in blissful ignorance of what had transpired after he had turned his back on Lac la Ronge, he spent much serious thought on the matter of how to get out of the country in the spring.

After long and mature deliberations he had decided to work eastward by canoe in the direction of Hudson's Bay. He had never been through that country himself, but he had met people who had, and he had been given to understand that the country that way was sparsely populated. But he would have to avoid carefully the main thoroughfares like the Churchill and the Saskatchewan rivers. He would have to keep well into the woods, and use the lesser, infrequently trafficked waterways.

Of course, he told himself with a touch of pathetic

self-pity, that would mean a lot of portaging and general hard work, but he could not see how that could be avoided if he wanted to pass unnoticed. Even then there was a possibility of falling in with chance travellers, but, if he did, it would be the worse for them. Charley could not afford to let anyone return with accounts of a lone, strange canoe-man roaming about the country. That would arouse the suspicion of the police at once, and they would soon be after him like a swarm of hornets.

He would have to turn south before he reached Hudson's Bay, he knew. It would not do to pass down along the coast-line. There were detachments of police both at Fort Churchill and Port Nelson, and they would soon discover him and put an end to his further progress.

No, he would have to proceed straight south, well back from the coast, and then work into the woods in Ontario. Down in that province he would be out of the territory patrolled by the mounted police, so if he only proceeded with discretion and caution he ought to be quite safe down there, he decided.

His journey would take months, of course, but he would take with him plenty of bacon, flour, coffee and sugar, and for the rest he could live on fish, partridges and rabbits. So the food question would be no problem, even though he had to avoid villages and trading-posts.

His further plans when he had got down to his place of refuge, were nebulous. But he felt quite confident that he would find something to do. It ought to be quite easy for a man with plenty of money in his pocket. And he had carefully figured out that he would have over fifteen hundred dollars left by the time he arrived in Ontario, even if he paid Nathan the hundred and fifty he had promised him. But he was not quite sure that Nathan would get that money.

Nathan, of course, had to make all arrangements about a canoe and provisions for Charley's flight, and Charley knew that Nathan would have to move very circum-

spectly to avoid arousing suspicions. Consequently, Nathan would not acquaint anybody with his destination or direction when he set out to join Charley, wherever the rendezvous might be. So if Nathan failed to return, nobody would know where to look for him, and they would draw the conclusion that Nathan had come to grief in some rapids somewhere. And nobody would bother more about him. And Charley was inclined to lean towards the conviction that it would be inexpedient for Nathan to return home once he had completed all arrangements for Charley. If Nathan disappeared there would be nobody who could blurt out any information about Charley's movements after he had left Lac la Ronge, and, further, Charley would be quite a lot of money to the good. So Charley felt more and more convinced that, provided Nathan was not too much on his guard, the latter would not be long for this world.

Charley was lying on his bunk after an early midday meal, blowing clouds of tobacco smoke towards the ceiling as he was once more reviewing his optimistic and altruistic dreams for the future, when the furious barking of his dogs warned him of the approach of visitors.

He jumped to his feet, grabbed his rifle, and hurried outside. As soon as he discovered the fur-clad man walking towards the shack, he half raised his weapon.

"Don't shoot!" cried the visitor hurriedly. "It's me, Nathan."

Charley grunted and lowered his rifle.

"Why do you come sneaking in this way?" he asked suspiciously and surlily. "Why didn't you come up the trail?"

"I had to move carefully," explained Nathan. "The police are up here hunting for you."

Charley's face grew as black as thunder, and he ripped out a fierce oath.

"How have they come to look after me up here?" he demanded, his face working with passion. This was such

a cruel, unexpected blow that for once he was unable to control his features.

"I know nothing about that," answered Nathan. "But two of them came around to my place this morning and asked me where you were hiding. They said they suspected me of knowing all about you."

"They suspect you of knowing where I'm hiding? How have they come to suspect you?" demanded Charley, glaring at Nathan.

"I don't know, but that's what they said."

"Curse you! You must have dropped some careless remarks to somebody," grated Charley, his eyes snapping with fury.

"No. I haven't spoken to any strangers since you have been up here," protested Nathan.

"Then your accursed family has done it for you," snapped Charley politely.

"They have not. They have not spoken to anybody, nor have they seen any strangers near our camp before the police came this morning," assured Nathan. He thought it prudent not to mention anything about his wife's trip down to the trading post. Not that he suspected his wife of having been loose-mouthed down there, but he felt quite certain that it would be impossible to convince Charley of the fact in his present ugly mood. "But let us go inside," suggested Nathan, "and I shall tell you all about it. It's cold out here, and besides, I'm hungry and want something to eat."

Growling in his throat, the scowling, peevish Charley led the way into the cabin, and while Nathan prepared a meal for himself from his pack—Charley was not in the mood to dispense any hospitality just then—he told of Weston's visit and what had been said. When he related that the police had informed him that Charley was suspected of having killed a policeman, his auditor loosened a liberal string of potent curses.

"How the hell did that sneaking, snooping bunch of

swine find out about that so soon?" he wanted to know, when his vocabulary had once more descended to the conversational stage.

"Then you really did kill a policeman?" asked Nathan, looking at Charley with troubled eyes.

"I did!" snapped Charley. "He was going to arrest me, so I did him in. And I'm going to do the same to anyone who tries to cross my path. I'm not a man who stands for interference from anybody. You have better remember that in case you want to live long. But I wonder how those swine found out about that red-coat? I thought I had covered up my tracks too carefully for that."

"How did you cover up your tracks?" asked Nathan.

Charley told him. He had no further reason for reticence, so he did full justice to the subject.

At the end of the recital Nathan shook his head despondently.

"No use trying to fool the police," he muttered lugubriously. "They always find out things."

"Well, they haven't found out about you killing that white trapper yet, but they will dam'ed quick if you try any tricks with me," said Charley threateningly.

"I'm not going to try any tricks, and you know it!" said Nathan a little testily. He was beginning to tire of Charley's constant threats and insinuations. "Do you want some of this grub?" he asked, lifting the frying-pan with the moose-meat and bacon, and the steaming coffee-pot off the cooking stove, and placing them on the floor beside his pack.

"No, I have just had grub," grunted Charley ungraciously.

There was silence for a while. Nathan attacked his meal with the eagerness and relish of a hungry man.

"Did you know any of the two red-coats?" asked Charley presently.

"I knew one. He is the chief of police down at Portage Bend. They call him Weston."

Charley's scowl deepened.

"That swine!" he growled viciously. "I have heard about him. He is a bad man. Did he have a half-breed called Angus Mackenzie with him?"

"No. He only had that other red-coat along. I don't know what he's called."

"Well, I'm glad that fellow Mackenzie was not with him," declared Charley, sounding slightly relieved. "They say he is the best tracker in the country, and I have heard many stories about the two. When they have been together, they have always got the man they were after, I have heard said. But alone, I don't fear that chief. White men never made good trackers. But I should like to know how they came to connect you up with me."

He looked suspiciously at Charley. Obviously he had not too much faith in Nathan's previous protestations.

"I don't understand that myself. Perhaps the chief was only bluffing," ventured Nathan. "He might say the same thing to all the people around here, hoping to trap somebody into confessing. But, however that is, you must clear out of here, Charley, and move into that wild country farther east. If they get a lot of police up here, like the chief said, and they start scouring the country, they might strike this place."

Charley laughed scornfully.

"A fine chance I should have of hiding in there," he said, with vast contempt. "If they find this camp, they'll also find the sleigh-tracks and follow them up."

"Yes. If you take your dogs along. But if you do what I tell you, you'll be all right." And Nathan forthwith expounded his brilliant scheme.

But if he had expected thunderous applause at his bright display of genius, he was sorely disappointed. Charley merely snorted contemptuously when he had finished.

"What about grub, if I do what you say?" he asked

with some derision. "Even if I only pack what I need most, I could only bring away with me supplies sufficient for three weeks or a month. And even if I shoot ptarmigans, caribou, and moose, I should still be short of flour, sugar, coffee and other things. And how am I to get hold of fresh supplies when I run out?"

"I'll get the stuff out to you," assured Nathan. "We can decide on some locality before you leave here, and I shall bring a load of grub out to you there as soon as possible."

"With the police suspecting you, and watching you?" sneered Charley. "You could not move many steps before they would be after you. They would swarm around you like bees."

"But they may only be bluffing about suspecting me," did Nathan point out.

"If they are only bluffing, there is no need for me to shift," declared Charley with finality.

Nathan pondered deeply. He had to admit the truth of Charley's argument. He tried frantically to find some other arguments which should convince Charley of the urgent necessity for flight, but he failed.

"All right. But don't blame me, then, if you get caught," observed the disappointed Nathan at last, as he sulkily continued his meal. "When the police start searching the country they will be sure to investigate this ravine sooner or later."

"Well, let them. The dogs will warn me when they come, and I shall take good care that they shall not go back and tell what they found," boasted Charley. "Me and my rifle will take care of that."

Nathan had nothing to say to that. He was too disgusted to speak at all. He had hoped that Charley would take kindly to his scheme, so that he could get rid of his dangerous neighbour, but now his last hope had been killed by the pig-headed Charley.

Again there was' silence in the shack for a while.

Nathan was diligently shovelling food into his mouth, while commiserating with himself for his misfortunes. Charley sat looking pensively straight ahead of him.

"Listen, Nathan!" exclaimed Charley suddenly. "I have thought out a scheme to get the better of those interfering red-coats. There are plenty of hills around your camp. I suppose there is one that is so high that a smoke-fire on top of it could be seen from the ridge above here?"

Nathan swallowed and nodded.

"Yes. There is one just behind my cabin. Before I left camp to go out here, I told my son to watch the trail and light a warning fire on that hill in case the red-coats should return and try to trail me. I watched that hill from the top of the ridge before I climbed down to your camp, but there was no fire. So the red-coats must have gone straight on like they said they would."

"Good. Now listen. As soon as the police return to your place, tell them that you have seen smoke down in this direction, and say I'm perhaps hiding down here. Then, when you have seen them start in this direction, light a smoky fire on top of that hill. I shall be watching morning, noon, and evening. As soon as I see your fire I shall know they are heading for here, and I shall be ready to receive them."

"And what will you do when they get here?" asked Nathan, who thought Charley was raving.

"I'll light a fire in the ravine, one that smokes just enough to be seen without making them suspicious of any trick. Then I shall lie in wait in the brush somewhere along the trail up here, and when they come along up the ravine I'm going to pick them off with my rifle, before they have any idea of danger," explained Charley gloatingly.

Nathan could only gape at his host in open-mouthed amazement at hearing this pleasant plan for wholesale murder.

"You are crazy!" he gasped at last, having found his voice. "Have you forgotten what the police chief told me, that there will be a whole bunch of them?"

"I have thought that over carefully, and I think that's only bluff," declared Charley. "Have you ever heard of the police sending out more than one or two to hunt for anybody?"

Nathan had to admit that he had not.

"Well, why should they act differently this time? I guess they just told you about that bunch to throw a scare into you, and trick you into confessing what you knew about me. I am willing to bet that there will be only the two who were at your place. And I'll take care of them," ended Charley, grinning evilly.

But Nathan shook his head.

"That's a mad, dangerous plan, and I won't have anything to do with it," he muttered.

"You'll do just what I tell you!" shouted Charley furiously, "or else I'll fix you properly."

Nathan squirmed. For the moment he had forgotten that he was hardly in the position to pick or choose.

"All right. All right," he murmured miserably. "I'll do what you say. But what are you going to do when you have got rid of the red-coats? They will soon be missed, and then hell will break loose around here."

"I won't be here when it breaks," grinned Charley. "It will take some time before they are missed, and it will take near two months after that before they can get a fresh bunch up here from the south to look for them. And that will give me plenty of time to get safely away. Now listen. As soon as I have fixed the red-coats and their dogs, I'll bury the whole lot so deeply in the snow that they will be hard to find. After, I'll light a fire on top of the ridge above, and then take my dogs and light out for the country east of here. As soon as you see my fire you'll follow on my trail with a sleighful of provisions. Then I'll hole up somewhere in there till the

spring. By the time a fresh bunch of police comes up here all tracks will have been wiped out by the snow. We are going to have blizzards pretty frequently this part of winter. After you have got the provisions out to me, you go back home and stand pat, and don't try to get near me till it's quite safe. But I'll tell you more about all that when you see me out there. Now, have you understood all? "

" Uhu. But what about my trapping, when I have to stay at home keeping watch for you all the time? " asked Nathan despondently.

" Let your wife and brats do the trapping for you. What use is a wife and family, anyhow, if they can't do your work for you? " asked Charley cynically. " You just go ahead and do what I've told you. Watch, and keep your wits about you. When did those red-coats say they would return? "

" In four or five days."

" Won't be much use to watch for your fire for a day or two then. But to be on the safe side, I'll take a look to-morrow around noon, and after that regularly. You are sure you understand it all? "

" I do. But I still think it is a crazy scheme, and that no good will come of it. Those red-coats are not easily tricked. I think it would be much better if you followed my advice and lit out at once."

" I'm staying right here," declared Charley firmly. " And those accursed red-coats can be fooled just as easily as other people. The trouble with you folks up here is that you are so scared of them that you lose your head as soon as you see them coming. I'll show you that an Indian can get the better of any white man. All you've got to do is to keep a cool head and show some spunk."

Nathan only shook his head doubtfully. He knew it was futile to argue. And, besides, he felt too despondent. Instead of getting rid of Charley as he had optimistically hoped, he now found himself involved in a game which

would place him in such a desperate situation that, in comparison, his former troubles were mere bagatelles.

He pulled out a big nickel watch and looked at it.

"Near three o'clock," he muttered. "I have better start back."

He got up and began to roll his pack.

"Remember what I told you, and what you are to do," was Charley's final injunction when Nathan stood ready to depart. "And do it good."

Nathan nodded. A few minutes later he had donned his snow-shoes again, had taken leave of Charley, and was plodding towards the steep wall of the ravine.

Charley stood leaning up against the door-casing, following the departing guest with his eyes. There was a cynical smile on his lips, and just before Nathan disappeared into the brush, Charley raised one hand to his nose in an eloquent and popular gesture, and at the same time he whispered some words which were anything but complimentary to the dear departed.

But Nathan tramped steadily along, quite unconscious of the pantomime behind his back. He saw too many troubles ahead to bother about what happened behind.

Charley chuckled to himself several times for the rest of that day when he thought of the brilliant scheme he had concocted for the confusion of the police. And he was still in the same jubilant mood when he started his day on the following morning.

He had eaten his breakfast, had carried in a generous supply of firewood, had fetched a bucket of water from the pond in the centre of the basin, and was taking a well-earned rest before he tackled the climb up to the top of the ridge to have a look for Nathan's signal-fire. But just as he had got comfortably settled on his bunk his dogs began to bark furiously. He jumped up and grabbed his rifle. What was the matter now, he wondered. Had that fool Nathan returned? He hurried over to the door and flung it open, but in front

of the door he stopped dead, wondering if he was seeing things.

Beside a spruce on the fringe of the forest, squarely facing Charley, stood a tall white man. As soon as Charley appeared the stranger began to speak in Cree:

"Charley Crow, you are under arrest, suspected of the murders of . . ."

But here Charley took a hand in the proceedings. Rapping out a fierce curse, he flung up his rifle, but before he got his weapon to his shoulder, something hummed angrily past his head and hit the wall with a sharp *spat!* And right behind it came the report of a rifle from inside the forest.

Startled, Charley pressed the trigger of his own rifle, and harmlessly the bullet whistled its way into the Great Unknown.

Frantically Charley worked the lever of his weapon, but again sounded an angry *spat!* uncomfortably close. Charley by now also discovered that the man by the spruce had disappeared, and that he was minus a target. So when a fresh bullet whizzed past his head and bit into the wall behind him, he decided that the neighbourhood was getting a little too hot. He jumped back into the shack and hurriedly closed and barred the door behind him.

CHAPTER XIII

A JOB WELL DONE

WHEN Weston and Mason had finished their meal at their temporary camp down near the trail leading up to Nathan Otter's camp, they started out again. But instead of continuing down the trail, they swung into the forest and followed on Angus's snow-shoe tracks, which were pointing east.

Weston walked ahead breaking trail, which was not a very hard job, as the snow was rather firm. And as the dogs had a light sleigh to pull, they were able to push ahead at fair speed.

Occasionally Weston stopped the sleigh and scouted carefully ahead before he gave Mason the sign to follow on.

Angus's trail curved gradually around towards Nathan Otter's camp, and when Weston roughly estimated that the camp could not be far away, their advance grew more careful and stealthy.

At last they came to a point where Angus's tracks led straight up the slope of a ridge on their left.

Weston halted the dogs, and told Mason to wait quietly till he returned. He quickly followed Angus's trail up to the summit of the ridge. They led him to a spruce, and when he took a cautious peep through the brush, he discovered Nathan's camp about a short half-mile away. It looked quite picturesque in its setting of tall, dark spruces, rearing up from the white ground

which sparkled in the sunshine. But Weston had very little time to admire scenery just then.

He looked about him, and found that Angus's tracks continued east along the ridge. And just at the beginning of his new trail, Angus had scratched some cabalistic signs in the snow.

Weston walked over and studied them, a grin on his face. He and Angus had years ago established a whole system of signs to be used in situations like the present, and it felt like old times to see these signs again.

There were three straight parallel lines, all having an arrow-head at their eastern extremity, and between the two most southern parallels was another line, which stood perpendicularly to both, and which was adorned with another arrow-head at its southern point.

Weston nodded his understanding. The lines told him that Nathan had gone towards the east, that Angus was following on a course parallel to his, and that Angus wanted them to follow on a track parallel and to the south of his own.

Weston returned to Mason and explained the situation, and they started their team along the floor of the low valley they were just in, and which would about carry them in the right direction. The floor of the valley was hard and firm enough to carry the dogs and the light sleigh, so there was no need for further trail-breaking. And this left Weston free to roam ahead and keep in touch with Angus's trail.

Shortly after noon Weston came to a point where Angus had apparently gone forward, then returned on his own tracks, and had swung about straight south. And beside his new course, Angus had left another futuristic picture.

Again there were three lines, but whereas Nathan's and Angus's respective courses were shown by straight lines, the line sketching Weston's further course curved outward, away from the other lines for a bit before it

bent back to the straight again. And in the front of the arrow-point on that line, Angus had scratched a fairly natural representation of some spruce-trees.

At once Weston hurried back to Mason and the dogs. Evidently, for some reason, Angus wanted them to make a detour before they followed on a parallel with his tracks again. Probably because the country around there was getting rather open. And Angus further had warned him that they were to keep well hidden in the timber, hence the artistic spruce trees.

When Weston got back to the team, he headed the dogs straight south into the forest, and for about half a mile they went straight ahead, well back from Angus's trail.

Then Weston stopped the team again and went over to find Angus's tracks. He found them weaving in and out among the trees on a ridge which ran alongside a wide, open, level valley, obviously a swamp in the summer. That he discovered no tracks out on that valley did not bother him. He knew a man on snowshoes would hardly leave an imprint on the hard, wind-swept crust on the snow out there.

Back to the sleigh once more, he headed the dogs towards the ridge Angus was then following, and along the foot of that ridge they continued on their way, the ridge itself screening them from anybody out on the open valley.

Several hours ahead plodded Angus steadily along. He had arrived at his concealed point of observation near Nathan's camp shortly before Weston and Mason turned up. He had waited patiently while they were inside the shack, and he had chuckled to himself when he saw Nathan's son slip down the trail a while after Weston and Mason had left. A few minutes later Nathan had appeared, and had started rapidly along a beaten path which was obviously part of his line-trail. Quickly Angus scratched the message for Weston in the snow

and hurried after Nathan, taking good advantage of all cover.

For several hours Nathan plodded steadily and purposefully along the path, never once bothering about any traps, but suddenly Angus discovered, as he took a careful peep along the trail, that Nathan had disappeared.

He slipped forward very cautiously. Nathan had turned off the trail, that was obvious, but on which side? Then he had a glimpse, through some screening brush, of Nathan's head and shoulders a few furlongs ahead of him on the same ridge. Evidently Nathan was standing in some depression. Angus remained motionless, watching Nathan with interest. The latter was looking intently in the direction of his camp for several minutes, but presently he turned to his left and soon disappeared from sight.

Hurriedly Angus sneaked forward, and in a few moments he discovered to his right a wide, open valley, which ran about due south for as far as he could see, and along the middle of that valley Nathan was hurrying ahead.

Angus discovered, just across an intersecting smaller valley, a ridge, which seemed to run along the western side of the open valley throughout its whole length; and he decided that he had to get across to that ridge. But as the country was too open to cross in safety just where he was, he hurried back along his own tracks.

He soon came to a place where he could cross under cover, and he quickly scratched the warning sign for Weston, slipped down the slope to the valley below, crossed it and climbed the spur of the ridge across, and then hurried along its back.

Along they went, mile after mile; Nathan out on the valley, and Angus hugging the trees on the crest of the ridge.

Presently Angus noticed that Nathan began to waver in his progress, and he seemed to take considerably more

interest in his back-trail. Suddenly he stopped, looked towards a ridge to his left, and seemed to ponder something. Then he obviously came to some sudden decision, for he turned sharply to his left, and began to stride towards the slope leading to the ridge across. And forthwith Angus was faced with a problem.

He could not cross the valley without being discovered immediately by the man across, so he would have to find some way around.

He slipped up to the rim of the ridge, and, well concealed, he took a survey of the southern part of the valley. He discovered to his satisfaction that only a mile or so farther south the valley met a heavy fringe of timber, which stretched right across and continued up the slope of the high ridge opposite. But he discovered something else. He saw the dark, deep gash in the hill-side which marked a ravine.

Angus's fertile imagination at once got busy. If Charley was hiding in that part of the country, a ravine like the one across would be just the sort of place he would choose for a refuge. Of course Nathan might be heading for some point beyond that ridge, but Angus would find out all about that when he had picked up the former's trail again.

He hurriedly covered the distance to the place where he could cross the valley unnoticed, slipped over to the other side and began toiling up the steep slope facing him, keeping well to the south of the ravine. He grinned when he thought of the difficulties Weston and Mason would have to contend with to negotiate that steep, heavily timbered slope with the sleigh in case Nathan had merely crossed that ridge and they had to continue the pursuit beyond. But though they had Angus's sympathy he could do nothing to improve conditions.

Half-way up the slope Angus stopped and sniffed suspiciously. Then he climbed a few steps and sniffed

again, and after a while a grim smile spread over his face. His keen nose had detected the faint but unmistakable scent of burning wood in the air, and he now felt certain that there was some kind of camp in the ravine.

As he hurried cautiously upwards, the smell of burning wood grew steadily more pronounced. He had just decided to cross to the rim above the ravine and risk a peep down, when the barking of a dog suddenly sounded from below. Several other dogs at once took up the chorus with great enthusiasm, and, swelled by the echoes, a clamouring uproar soon welled up from the ravine.

Angus hurried across to the rim, and from behind the friendly shelter of some brush he looked down, and he at once hugged himself in self-congratulation.

Right below him the ravine formed a basin which was fairly wide and open in the centre; and across, near the fringe of the forest, stretching down from the opposite wall, was a cabin. In front of the door stood two men. One was Nathan, and the other, who carried a rifle in his hand, he decided must be the elusive Charley Crow. He had never seen Charley, of course, but he had been furnished with a description of that gentleman, and that tallied. Anyhow, even without a description, it would not have taxed Angus's intelligence unduly to establish the identity of the coy recluse.

The two men below soon entered the cabin, and the dogs gradually quieted down and rolled up again for another snooze.

Angus drew his caribou-coat well around him, pulled the hood down over his face, and prepared to wait. He wanted to see if Nathan intended to return, or whether he was going to stay there for the night.

While he waited he carefully mapped out in his mind the whole basin and the lay-out of the camp, taking in every point which could be of future use, especially the positions of the dogs. He also fished out of his pack a

piece of boiled, cold bacon, and a frozen bannock, and munched the somewhat sketchy lunch with good humour and courage.

He was beginning to find the wait a mite too chilly, and had about decided to withdraw unobtrusively for a little spell of exercise farther back, when the door of the shack opened; and Nathan came out, followed by his host, who still clung to his rifle, Angus noticed. Nathan was dressed for the trail, his pack on his back. He put on his snow-shoes, shook hands with the owner of the camp, and began to walk towards the opposite wall of the ravine. That was probably the way he had come in, thought Angus.

Angus had seen enough. He backed quickly away from his shelter and began to scramble down the hill-side as fast as he could go. He wanted to get to Weston as quickly as possible to report his observations, and, further, to find out what was to be done about Nathan, whether he should be allowed to return home, or be intercepted and detained.

In the meantime Weston and Mason had advanced doggedly, though their progress had been considerably slower in the afternoon. The tract of country they had got into was filled with narrow draws which seemed to meander aimlessly south-west and west, and they were nearly all of them filled with dense forest and brush. It had often proved difficult to find a path for the sleigh, and they frequently had to make tedious detours before they could resume their general course once more.

The afternoon was well advanced, and dusk was not far off, when Weston, on one of his periodical visits to locate Angus's tracks, discovered out in the middle of the wide valley a man who was striding energetically northwards. The man was too far away for Weston to establish his identity with certainty, but he thought he recognized Nathan Otter.

He decided to wait for a while where he was. If that

man out there was Nathan, Angus would not be far away, he knew. Nor did he have long to wait, for about ten minutes later Angus came striding towards him.

As soon as Angus discovered Weston he placed a bemitted hand on his mouth, while he pointed with the other in the direction of the man out on the valley. Weston nodded his understanding.

"That Nathan," explained Angus in a guarded voice, when he got up to where Weston was waiting. There was a pleased grin on his face. "Your scheme work fine, Wess," he continued in a congratulatory tone. "You sure scared Nathan good. He sent son back to watch for you, an' then he make tracks quick for a fellow in hidden camp in a ravine down south. Went to tell him all 'bout things, I guess. An' I guess that fellow is Charley Crow. What shall we do 'bout him Nathan? Take him by neck?"

Weston spoke Cree infinitely better than Angus spoke English, but in spite of that Angus would insist on parading his lingual abilities when opportunity offered.

"No, we'll let Nathan go for the present," answered Weston. "Yes, I discovered Nathan's son lovingly watching the front entrance to Dad's camp. Looks as if we are getting somewhere, after all, in this affair."

"You bet!" boasted Angus. And he proceeded to give an outline of his past movements and observations, while Weston smiled his approval.

"Where Mason an' dog-train?" asked Angus, his story finished.

"A mile or so back in the woods," explained Weston. "We blundered into a lot of tricky country, and had to twist and turn without making much headway."

"Well, night not far off, so guess we better camp soon," counselled Angus. "Have to camp well back in woods, where fire can't be seen, in case him fellow down there has a look from top o' ridge above his camp. Won't do for him to see sign o' people near, an' get 'spicious. An'

then we cross open stretch out there before daylight in the mornin', an' sneak up to that camp the way Nathan went. Cabin on this side o' ravine, so better go that way. What say? "

" Right. We'll get back to Mason, and then go ahead and find a good camping-site. And to-night, after we have fed, we'll discuss our plans for the future."

Mason's face expressed vivid hope and excitement when he discovered that Weston was accompanied by Angus.

" Angus has spotted the lair of somebody, and I'm inclined to think that somebody is our missing friend, Charley Crow," announced Weston.

" That's good news, sir," grinned Mason. " Your ruse evidently worked quite well."

" I think so. At least, Nathan lost no time in rushing out to have a pow-wow with a shy customer lurking coily amongst the hills after I had sprung my little bluff on him," smiled Weston. " How are the dogs working? "

" They seem to be getting fagged, sir."

" No wonder. They've had to work hard all day in spite of the light sleigh. But they're going to have a good, long rest shortly. We camp soon. Here, Angus, dump your pack into the sleigh, and go ahead and find a good spot."

With a grunt of satisfaction Angus swung his pack off his back and let it drop into the sleigh. Then he started ahead, Weston and Mason following with the team.

About twenty minutes later they met Angus, who told them he had found a comfortable clearing with plenty of dry wood close at hand. It was not half a mile farther along, and was just below a fairly lofty ridge, which would screen their fire from their furtive friend to the south-east, in case he should take into his head to take a look at the country from the ridge above his camp.

When they arrived at the chosen site Weston and Mason began to prepare camp, while the untiring Angus set out to find the easiest way from their present camp to the wide

valley. As that trip was to be made in darkness, it was necessary to pick out the course beforehand.

Dusk was well advanced by the time Angus returned. A huge fire was burning, and Weston was wielding the pots and pans with his usual energetic efficiency.

"Smells good, boys," observed Angus, sniffing appreciatively. "I'm near starve. Foun' fairly easy trail," he added.

"Good. Sit down. Grub will be ready in a minute. I'm making an extra special meal, seeing we all need it. Even the dogs will get extra rations," grinned Weston, waving his hand towards the other side of the fire, where ten white-fish had been propped up against a log to thaw. "They'll all get two apiece. And don't forget to sprinkle them well with sulphur, Mason," he ended, grinning provocatively at Angus, who confined himself to snort his disgust.

With a grunt of contentment Angus lowered himself on the spruce-mat beside Mason. He opened his caribou-coat, and glued his eyes to the frying-pan and coffee-pot, thereby conscientiously, though unconsciously, imitating Mason, who had long since discovered the soul-stirring fascination in that particular pastime.

After the meal, which had been hailed by humans and canines with the wholehearted appreciation it undoubtedly deserved, Angus was called upon to submit in detail a report of his observations up at the camp in the ravine.

Angus demonstrated the lay-out of the camp on the spruce-mat between them, using bits of bannock to mark features of special interest, such as the location of the shack, the positions of the dogs, etc.

"Well, Wess, what we do now?" asked Angus, when he had made everything clear.

"Dashed if I know yet," confessed Weston cheerfully. "The situation is undoubtedly somewhat muddled. So a certain amount of tact is indicated, I think. There are several points sticking out which make the whole business

rather ticklish. For instance, we don't know that the fellow down there is actually Charley Crow."

"*Huh?*" from Angus, who stared at Weston as if he was afraid that the latter had taken leave of his senses. "'Course him Charley! Who else?"

"That's what we don't know. And we have to find out for certain before we start tackling him. You've never seen Charley before, Angus; I remember you told me down at the Bend."

"No, but me sure as hell him Charley. Who else?"

"That's what we want to find out," grinned Weston.

"*Huh!* Perhaps you aim go up an' ask him?" asked Angus with heavy sarcasm.

"That's just what I intend to do."

"*Huh?*" Angus looked wide-eyed at Weston. "You aimin' make soo'cide? Didn't I tell you, him fellow had rifle all ready in han' when he came out to meet Nathan? An' whatfor does a fellow carry rifle when vis'tors come?"

Angus felt quite convinced now that all was not well with Weston's grey matters.

"Don't excite yourself, Angus," laughed Weston. "I haven't for a moment lost sight of that rather interesting fact about the rifle. Past experiences have taught me that if a fellow receives callers with a rifle in his hand, he won't hesitate to use it if the visitors should prove to be undesirables. And something whispers to me that we shall be in that category. That is what I meant when I said that the situation must be handled with tact. Now listen, both of you. Here's the first part of the programme. We cross that open stretch out yonder before daylight, as already agreed. As soon as we are on the other side we move down to the mouth of the ravine, keeping well within the forest. There we'll leave the dogs and sleigh in your charge, Mason, while . . . Don't worry, Mason," he interpolated with a smile, as he noticed the expression of deep disappointment which spread over

Mason's face at his last words, "you'll get into the fun later, if I'm not much mistaken. As I was saying, we'll leave you, Mason, and the dogs down at the mouth of the ravine for the time being, while Angus and I sneak up to the top of the ridge, just above the camp of yon interesting warrior. Perhaps the gentleman will come up to have a look round, and then we'll tackle him politely but firmly when he comes along. But I hardly think he'll be so obliging. If Nathan actually went out to warn him about us, he will believe that we are miles away just now, so he'll hardly expect trouble for some time yet.

"If he doesn't come up, we shall have to go down to him as soon as he appears to be anchored in his shack for the time being. We can't tackle him if he is roaming around outside in the woods, because he might spot us first, and then shooting, bloodshed, unpleasantness, and other horrible things might start at once. So we have to wait till we know his exact position. As soon as we get down there I shall lose no time in inviting him to have a little chat with me."

"And what I do with corpse?" interrupted Angus.

"What corpse?"

"Yours, o' course," snorted the disgusted Angus.

"Oh, there won't be any corpse," grinned Weston. "You are to prevent that, Angus."

"*Huh? Me?*" demanded Angus in outraged amazement. "How can me help when you want make God dam' fool o' yourself?"

"Well, listen, and I shall whisper my secret," said Weston, laughing at the scandalized expression on Angus's face. He spoke at some length, and gradually Angus's heavy frown began to clear a little.

"That perhaps work, but dam' risky," declared Angus, when Weston had finished. "But that your bis'ness. But how you aim to get him if he shuts himself up in shack after you had talk with him?"

"Lord only knows. I'll admit that just at present the

road is dark. Rushing him is out of the question, seeing he will know we are there and will be ready for us. There is about fifty yards from the nearest cover to the shack, if I got you right, Angus? "

Angus nodded his head emphatically.

"Good fifty," he said.

"Well, if we tried to rush him, he would take pot-shots at us when we crossed the open stretch. He will fire from cracks in the wall if he hasn't got any loop-holes. And even if there aren't any cracks he can quickly make some, by picking out the caulking from some of the chinks between the logs. And he would get at least one or two of us when we rushed. And even if one of us managed to get up to the shack, there would be a firmly barricaded door between him and his quarry, so he would be just as far off as he was at the start. No, that scheme won't work at all."

"But what about sneaking up to his door at night, sir," ventured Mason. "Then we could lay for him till he came out in the morning. He'll have to go out sometime, and if we were on the spot we could overpower him before he knew what was up."

"Won't do," declared Weston. "The fellow would know we were there. All Indians have sharp ears, so he would hear the creak of the snow when we sneaked up. And then he would make things interesting for us in the morning by picking us off before he came out. And we should have our retreat cut off into the bargain. No, that scheme is a wash-out too."

"We try same trick as we did to Frenchy that time," spoke up Angus. "Mason an' me keep him busy at one en', an' you sneak up an' point pistol at him, through crack behin' him, an' threaten him come out."

"I don't think that would work with this customer," said Weston. "Frenchy was a coward, who was easy to bluff and scare. But if our friend down there is actually the man who killed Connor, there is certainly nothing the

matter with his nerve and enterprise. He might call my bluff, refuse to surrender, and might even start in to try to write me off; a pastime I object to. And besides, I want to catch this fellow undamaged, so that I can hand him over to Justice hale, sound, and in good repairs. But we'll hit on some scheme by and by, after we have seen how he acts. So we have better postpone forming any plans till we are up there, and have studied things a bit *in loco*."

"Huh? In where?" asked Angus with pardonable curiosity.

"*In loco*. That's dago for on the spot," explained Weston with a grin.

"I don't know no dago-talk," deprecated Angus. "I only know him Greek rest'rant-keeper down at the Bend. An' I never hear him talk nothin' but English."

"Well, you haven't missed much," smiled Weston. "But as we can't do any more to-night, I vote we turn in. I don't know about you fellows, but I feel dashed sleepy. We were up early this morning; we are going to get up still earlier to-morrow morning, so I intend to give my well-known imitation of a cocoon forthwith."

The other two both declared that they quite saw eye to eye with him in the matter. They knocked out their pipes, unfolded their beddings, and crawled in.

A few minutes later the only life in camp were the licking flames, chasing each other unceasingly up and down the logs in the fire, and a few curious rabbits, which cautiously surveyed the camp, prepared to scurry away at the first sign of danger, while overhead a brilliant Aurora Borealis played its restless, soundless symphony of light.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ASSAULT

THEY crossed the valley on the following morning during that bleak hour before dawn, when the darkness of night seems twice as dense; when the cold is intensified, and seems to strike a chill right to the very bones of the traveller; and when the brooding, oppressive silence of Nature accentuates a hundredfold stronger than during the light of day the utter, awesome loneliness of the northern wilderness.

The three men with their dog-train slipped along in dead silence, a deeper bulk in the darkness being the only indication of their presence. Not a word was exchanged. It was as if the hush of Nature had extended itself to them, and had for the moment filled them with a certain measure of depression.

But by the time they had reached the lower mouth of the ravine everything was changed. The sun was gilding the tops of the trees over on the ridge to the west, and the country, which only a few hours earlier had seemed so bleak, inhospitable, and forbidding, now appeared invitingly cheerful, almost jovial.

Weston and his companions had some time back decided that they were once more back in the best of all possible worlds, and were again correspondingly cheerful. Their guarded, low-voiced conversation was bright and sprightly, and smiles were constantly in evidence. The only one who was inclined to look somewhat sadly thoughtful at times

was Constable Mason. He was afraid that his companions would have finished the whole job before he could have a chance to attend the frolics. But at heart he was an optimist, so the bulk of his reflections was hopeful.

He followed the disappearing forms of his comrades with envious eyes as they left him, and then with a sigh he settled down to wait, pessimism for the while having an innings. He was debarred from making a fire for tactical reasons, but his furs and exercise broke the worst discomfort of the freezing temperature.

In the meantime Weston and Angus were plodding up the slope. They moved very carefully and warily, making use of all cover in case the suspect should be anywhere around. But they came across no living thing except a jack-rabbit, which, as soon as it saw the two men, suddenly remembered that it had urgent business elsewhere, and scurried off in a hurry to get there.

At last Weston and Angus had worked their stealthy way to the edge of the ravine, and, well concealed, they had a bird's-eye view of the camp and all that was going on down there.

They discovered the man of mystery leisurely doing his morning's chores. When they arrived on the scene he was just carrying firewood into his shack from an untidy woodpile. He made several trips, evidently laying in a sufficient supply to last him till the following day.

Later he appeared with a bucket and an axe. He walked to the centre of the basin, chopped a hole through the ice to the water below, filled his bucket and returned to his shack. He moved quite unhurriedly and unconcernedly, evidently quite unsuspecting of any lurking danger.

But though he apparently felt quite secure, he obviously did not take any chances. His rifle had been his faithful companion on all his trips, and he clung to it as jealously as a mother to her first-born, as Weston confided to himself.

When the recluse had returned to his shack with the

water-bucket, he slammed the door shut behind him with a finality which plainly announced that for some time, at least, he intended taking his ease within, where the temperature was more comfortable.

Weston nudged Angus, and they quickly slipped over the rim. They were soon swallowed up by the dense growth of spruces which clung tenaciously to the steep slope, and with great care they descended to the bottom of the ravine.

From above Weston had carefully studied the lay of the land down there, and as soon as they had safely reached the floor of the basin he led Angus to a tree, from where he had a view of the entrance to the cabin, and with a sign bade him take his stand there. His eyes asked a question, and Angus gravely nodded his head. Angus felt far from happy.

Weston sneaked some ten yards farther along to a hefty spruce right on the edge of the clearing. He at once walked boldly out in the open, his rifle hanging carelessly at the trail. The nearest dog immediately discovered him, and voiced its indignant protest at the invasion, and the protest was faithfully taken up by its brethren with great zest. The door of the shack was thrown open from within, and the occupant burst out.

As we know, he inconsiderately cut short Weston's well and neatly formulated formal notice of arrest, and further proclaimed in no uncertain manner that he protested strongly against any infringements on his personal liberty.

As soon as the door had slammed shut behind the indignant occupant, Weston, who had sought cover behind the spruce as soon as he found his would-be assailant's attention occupied elsewhere, walked over to Angus, a huge grin on his face.

"Just like old times," he remarked with relish. "Thank you, Angus. You carried out your part of the contract in great style. Did you see him jump?"

"You sure him Charley Crow now?" asked Angus a little acidly.

"Quite, old friend of my youth. At least he didn't say he was not, so I think we can safely take for granted that he is. And he obviously refuses to submit to arrest."

"'Course him does!" snorted Angus. "Did you 'spect him come up an' eat out o' your han'?" he asked with elaborate sarcasm. "Wherefor you do all this dam' foolin, anyhow?"

"Oh, just because," answered Weston, his grin broadening.

"You know, me think you gettin' foolish since you got to be inspector," growled Angus. "Walkin' up riskin' to be shot by him mad bohunk. What would ha' happen' to you if my rifle miss fire? Answer me dat!" There was accusation, disgust, and stern reproof in Angus's voice. "Anyhow, guess it no use talkin' to dam' fool," he added. "What we do now?"

"I'm going to slip across to that spruce across the basin," said Weston, pointing. "From there I can watch both the door and the window. It is possible, though not probable, I'll admit, that the window can be opened, and it would be a hell of a note if that fellow slipped out that way while we were watching his front door. As soon as you see me waving to you from my new position, you buzz off and fetch Mason and the dogs. If that fellow in there tries to open the door in the meantime, send a few bullets into it. That'll make him change his mind in a hurry. Bye-bye," and Weston strode rapidly off through the timber to work around to his objective. Five minutes later he waved to Angus, who immediately forsook his post and disappeared down the ravine.

To kill time while he waited, Weston studied all details of the camp and the cabin while cudgelling his brain for a scheme to catch the inmate alive without taking foolhardy risks. He had plenty of time, and the man in the cabin did nothing to break his chain of thought. Once the latter

had tried a cautious peep through the window, and just to impress on him that watchful eyes were on the job, Weston sent a bullet into the window-frame. And just to convince the curious one that he was securely bottled up, Weston sent another bullet into the door. After that the occupant of the cabin was seen no more.

Weston had waited for more than an hour, and was beginning to feel cold and bored, when he at last heard noises from down the ravine which heralded the approach of the rest of the war-party. The alert dogs around the cabin also heard the noises and greeted the newcomers with a noisy chorus. The approaching dogs, keenly sensing their obligations, joined lustily in, and for a few snappy minutes the ravine sounded like a fair representation of bedlam. Weston watched the window keenly. He grinned when he thought he saw a vague, furtive shadow within, and he pressed the trigger. The shadow precipitately disappeared, presumably retiring to a more unobtrusive point.

The dogs lost interest in their demonstrations after a while, and presently Angus joined Weston.

"Ev'rything all right," reported the former. "We have put dogs an' sleigh in small clearin' well back. Mason is standin' where I stood, hopin' for Charley to come out."

"Righto. Go over and tell Mason to come over here. I have got a scheme, and want to tell you both all about it. Tell Mason to send a couple of bullets into the door before he quits the place over there. That'll give our friend the impression that he is quite surrounded, and it'll keep him from getting reckless, and attempts of gambling."

Some minutes later Mason's rifle cracked, and Weston at once sent a few bullets into the cabin wall near the window, to convince the hemmed-in man that there were more than one rifle on the job. Shortly after Mason and Angus joined him.

"Here, Mason, you take up your position here for a

while," invited Weston. "I'm half frozen. Reserve your eyes exclusively for the warrior in the cabin, and if you see him try to open the door or to take a peep through the window, just send him a few reminders along. But fire low, so you don't hit the gentleman by accident. At the same time, keep your ears open, and listen to what I have to say."

"Go on, Wess. Let's hear all about it," encouraged Angus indulgently.

"Well, here's my scheme. I admit it isn't very brilliant, and I'm not at all feeling satisfied that it'll work, but if it doesn't we'll have to try something else. You see the stove-pipe sticking out of the roof near the corner by the door, Angus?"

Angus looked and nodded.

"If you sit astride my shoulders, can you reach the top of it, do you think?"

"I sure can," averred Angus.

"Right. As soon as it gets dark, Mason will post himself here and see to it that yon warrior keeps to his home sweet home. Then you, Angus, will climb on my shoulders with a ball of brush in one hand and some snow in the other. Then I'll carry you across to the shack below the pipe. You'll dump the snow down the pipe, and plug the pipe with the brush after. As soon as the snow hits the fire, it will start smoking like anything, and as the smoke can't get out through the pipe it will naturally fill the shack. And if it smokes as strongly as I hope for, the chap inside will soon find the place too uncomfortable and make a bolt for the open, and I shall be waiting lovingly for him by the door. What do you think of it?"

Angus shook his head doubtfully.

"Me hardly think make enough smoke for that," he observed. "Most Injuns tough guys, an' can stan' plenty smoke. Perhaps him stay."

"Yes, he may. But it's worth trying. If that doesn't work, I suppose Mason and I shall have to force our way

in to him through the door. You, Angus, as the crack shot, would have to post yourself by the window, and as soon as he raises his rifle when we crash into his happy home, you'll have to give him one through the arm so he can't work his rifle. Can't say I like the idea, though. It's too darn crude. I wish we had a stink-bomb or something to throw in to him, that would——"

He suddenly broke off and stared blankly at Angus, as if he were wondering why the latter existed at all. But almost immediately the blank expression on his face was replaced by an all-enfolding grin. In his exuberance of spirits he tried to shuffle a few fancy steps, and as he had quite overlooked the fact that snow-shoes make awkward ballet-shoes, he at once lost his balance, and promptly sat down in the snow. But the grin survived and developed into a laugh.

"Oh, my aunt," he chortled from the ground without bothering to get up. "Oh, my sainted aunt!" he added for good measure.

"What's got into you now?" asked Angus suspiciously.

"I've got a scheme. The scheme. An absolute corker," chuckled Weston with becoming modesty. "And when I have told you all about it, Angus, you won't be quite as ready with your sneers as in the past."

"What you mean? Shoot ahead," ordered Angus a little coldly.

Weston did. And as he unfolded his plan, Angus's face gradually cleared, and after he had had a few searching questions answered satisfactorily, he actually chuckled; while Mason almost forgot the job in hand in his glee.

"That sure soun's the stuff, Wess," did Angus voice his commendation when Weston had finished. "I guess you still got some head-fillin's left, Wess," he added handsomely. "Though you do dam' fool things now an' then," he qualified with some severity.

Weston heaved himself to his feet.

"Well, a fellow can't let his brains work overtime

always," he grinned. "But about this scheme. We can't do anything about it till it gets dark. That fellow may have all sorts of peep-holes and loop-holes in his shack by this time. And if he sees us coming, he might bust up the whole show by spraying us with missiles from that jolly old rifle of his. But while we wait for darkness we have to keep that fellow securely bottled up. We'll take turn and turn about watching the shack from here. Half an hour on and one hour off. We'll build a nice big fire near our dogs, where the fellows off duty can wallow in comfort and luxury. And remember, the fellow on duty will have to send a few shots into the shack from time to time, just to tell our friend that we are still on the job. We've got plenty of ammunition, so there's no reason why we should be mean and stingy. Now you take first trick, Mason. Angus will relieve you in half an hour, and I follow Angus. And keep your eyes wide open."

Mason nodded an emphatic affirmative, and Angus and Weston left him to go along and start the fire.

The rest of the day passed uneventfully; at least as long as daylight lasted. The man in the cabin made no attempt to break out, and the sentry on duty spent an unprofitable and monotonous half-hour.

At last the purplish-grey shadows of approaching night began to spread over the land, and down in the deep ravine details were rapidly merging into a dim, vague and blurred phantasmagoria.

Weston decided that the moment for action had come. He sent Mason off to relieve Angus, who was just then on sentry duty. Before Mason left, Weston instructed him to fire steadily into the shack from now on, just to give the man inside something to keep him from being too inquisitive in other directions. Mason was to send his shots wherever his fancy dictated, but Weston impressed on him to remember that the corner of the shack near the stove-pipe was strictly tabooed.

When Angus turned up a few minutes later, he armed himself with certain implements carefully prepared for the occasion, and with huge grins on their faces, Weston and he sneaked up to the edge of the clearing. They had discarded their snow-shoes. The snow around the camp had been fairly well trampled, so snow-shoes were quite unnecessary, and would only be encumbrances.

To their right they could periodically see the stabbing licks of fire from Mason's rifle, as that zealot religiously and unstintingly carried out his part of the contract, the reports from his rifle filling the ravine with an uproar which about drowned all other noises.

"Up you go, Angus," invited Weston cheerfully, "and remember, as soon as you have finished your job slide down from my back as fast as you can, so that I can be ready to receive our friend when he comes stampeding out from his home, sweet home."

"Sure," answered Angus with a grin. He was enjoying himself. Weston had quite rehabilitated himself in Angus's eyes after his lamentable lapse earlier in the proceedings. Evidently Weston was still a man of imagination and resource, so his deplorable exhibition of lunacy must have been only a mere passing spasm was his generous verdict.

As soon as Angus was safely straddling Weston's shoulders, the latter hurried forward towards their objective, while at his post out yonder Mason ruggedly continued playing his one-sided game of vendetta with great zest and earnestness. He felt not a little peeved at the rather passive rôle allotted to him in the final round, and he had decided to make up for his enforced inactivity by plenty of noise.

Charley Crow had spent the day trying to find some way out of the tangle in which he had found himself so unexpectedly enmeshed. Though his meditations had been frequently interrupted in order to give him a chance of piling vituperations, opprobrium and curses on the unconscious heads of his besiegers.

When he had jumped back into the shack after the first exchange of pleasantries between him and his visitors, he had first felt dazed and stunned. For a while the crushing fact that the police were right on top of him when he had thought them miles out of the way had quite robbed him of the faculty for thinking clearly. But his temporary mental paralysis had soon passed, and when he began to give serious thought to the "How's?" a white, shimmering fury began to well up in him.

There could only be one reason for this sudden and unexpected appearance of the police, he decided. Nathan must assuredly have double-crossed him, and must have led the police up here. Now he thought he understood Nathan's eagerness to try induce him to move farther east. In all probability an ambush had been prepared in that direction somewhere along his course, so he would have jumped right into waiting and open arms if he had ventured out. And as Charley reviewed Nathan's imagined iniquities in all their heinous extent, he fairly shook with rage, and he swore that whatever happened to himself, Nathan was going to pay dearly for his treachery. Yes, even if he was to go under, he would see to it that Nathan went down with him, even if it was the last thing he did on earth.

But revenge would have to be postponed for a while. Charley had other matters to occupy his attention just then.

He knew he was in a tight corner, but he still hoped that he should be able to find a way out. True, the police were outside his shack, but he was inside behind a stoutly barred door. The only way to get him would be for the police to force their way in, and he sincerely wished they would try that. If they did, he could shoot them down before they could get to him. His rifle was a repeater with five rounds in the chamber, and the speed and accuracy with which he handled that rifle left nothing to be desired, he knew. So five cartridges would dispose

of five attackers. And there would hardly be more than five. Nathan had said two, but then Nathan had evidently lied about everything else, so he had probably lied about that too. But Charley knew for certain that there were at least two. When he had been out in front of the cabin he had seen one, while another had fired those shots at him from back in the forest. But he should like to know exactly how many he was up against.

He stepped carefully up to the window for a guarded peep out, but immediately a bullet drummed against the outer wall, not far away from him. He jumped back, cursing. And almost at once came the *spat!* of a second bullet from over by the door. Evidently they were keeping close guard. And Charley was not in the mood to offer himself as a target.

Charley sat down on his bunk and pondered the situation deeply. He had heard about the methods of the police, and he knew that one of their chief rules was to get any fugitive alive. So he felt fairly satisfied that he was safe as far as his life was concerned as long as he kept within the shack. But they might try to cripple him by sneaking up to the window and firing at him from there, continued Charley his reflection, reasoning strictly from his own point of view. However, Charley decided that if they tried that trick, whoever made the attempt should get no chance of firing at him. He would even be lucky if he came out of the venture alive.

But, on the other hand, he could not remain inside the shack for any lengthy period. He had plenty of grub, of course, but there was the question of water. Charley only had that one bucket he had fetched in that morning, but that would not last him more than one day, perhaps two if he was very careful. But when that bucket was eventually empty, he would be seriously up against it. Nor would his supply of firewood last him longer than till the following morning. And it was quite out of the question to venture outside to replenish supplies.

The more he thought, the more firmly he began to feel convinced that the only way in which he could hope to turn the tables was for him to break away from the shack. If he could manage to dash into the forest without being disabled or caught, he knew he could more than hold his own. He flattered himself that he had no peer as a stalker, and he could easily sneak around and pick off one after the other of his besiegers. Perhaps he could work right up to the edge of the ravine, and from that point of vantage he could shoot his pursuers down while they were below him and hopelessly handicapped.

After he then had disposed of his would-be captors he could carry out the programme he had outlined to Nathan.

But at this point in his meditations he paused. He suddenly remembered that Nathan had apparently turned traitor. And in that case he had no go-between to arrange for supplies for the winter, and for canoe and outfit in the spring when he intended to continue his flight.

But had Nathan turned traitor? he asked himself. Now, when he thought the matter over more calmly, he could not quite see how Nathan possibly could have. Nathan would know that he would be risking his own neck by giving Charley away, and Charley knew Nathan well enough to decide that he was not a man who was inclined to take heavy risks. And, besides, he could not quite see how Nathan could profit by treachery. So perhaps Nathan was not in this after all, but the police had somehow blundered on his hiding-place by some lucky fluke. But he would find out all about that. As soon as he had disposed of his besiegers he would pay a lightning call to Nathan's camp, and, whether or not that gentleman was guilty of treachery, Charley would scare him into assisting him further. He would impress on Nathan that if he, Charley, was caught, he would inform the police, not alone of the murder of that white trapper, but he would also make them a present of the interesting bit of fiction

that Nathan had deliberately sent the patrol which had been sent up to seize Charley into a previously arranged deadly ambush. And he would tell his story so convincingly that it would be believed. And after that Nathan would be like wax in his hands, decided Charley with a grin. When, then, Nathan had finally furnished all that was necessary for his further flight in the spring, and was of no further use, Charley would take steps to eliminate his former ally as a possible future menace.

But the first condition for realizing these wonderful and rosy dreams was to get into the forest. And Charley thought he knew how that could be managed. The attempt had to be carried out at night, of course, when darkness hampered and destroyed all marksmanship. He would cram his pockets full of cartridges, sling his snowshoes over his back, and take his loaded rifle in his hand. Then he would suddenly fling the door open and sprint for the forest before the police would be aware of his intentions.

Of course there might be a sentinel outside the door, but if he chose the right moment he would catch that individual off his guard. And the moment which to him appeared most appropriate, were those dreary hours near morning, when the watchers would be slackening after their night's vigil in the freezing cold, and when they would be inclined to be less alert.

All in all, Charley reviewed his scheme several times, and each time found it more and more flawless, feasible and attractive. So he began to view the future once more with hope and faith.

After having arrived at his momentous decision, Charley began to take life easy. He ate and smoked, and did not bother much about the watchers outside. For their periodical musketry demonstrations he had only a contemptuous grin. If they wanted to waste their ammunition wantonly and recklessly he had no objections. And besides, as long as they were pumping lead around the

shack he could feel quite certain that there were no inconvenient prowlers about.

He had made all preparations for his sally before darkness set in, as he did not dare light his lantern once it got dark. He had tied his snow-shoes together, ready to be slung around his neck, and had placed them near the door, where he could easily and quickly pick them up in the darkness. He also filled every available pocket cram full of cartridges.

He felt supremely thankful for his foresight in laying in an ample supply of firewood. Now, as there was no need for economizing, he could stuff the stove and spend his time in comfort till it was time for him to sally forth.

At last dusk invaded the cabin and gradually deepened, but the glare from the stove spread a soft gloaming inside which annoyed Charley to a degree. He wished he had thought of hanging a blanket or some sacking in front of the window. But perhaps he could still remedy that omission.

Just at that moment Mason began his peeved bombardment of the shack, and that turned Charley's chain of thought. He wondered, with keen suspicion, what his besiegers were up to now. Perhaps they intended breaking through the door or the window, and that the firing was intended to throw him off his guard. Charley grinned his derision at the childishness of his attackers, if that was their idea. It would take more than a few harmless shots to confuse him.

He sneaked up to the window for a cautious peep out, taking good care not to show up between the window and the glare from the stove. But all he could see were the flashes from the hard-worked rifle out yonder.

For one moment he felt strongly tempted to send a few return shots towards the flashes, in the hope that a lucky shot might incapacitate at least one of his besiegers, but he quickly suppressed the temptation. Chances of success

were far too small, and he did not want to waste any of his ammunition.

Suddenly he wheeled towards the stove. The pipes had rattled, as if they had been shaken by somebody. But the feeble light convinced him that everything was all right over there. Probably a piece of burning wood had cracked, he decided.

He again turned his attention to the window. He hoped those fellows out there would really try to force their way in. That would simplify matters considerably, because he intended to take good care that whoever tried it should not survive the experiment. And . . .

His reflections were cut short by a violent fit of coughing. A pungent, acrid smell had attacked his nose and throat, and had almost taken his breath away. He sneezed, cleared his throat noisily, and spit energetically, but without sensing any relief. The fumes which had pervaded the previously not over sweet atmosphere of the room were steadily gaining in strength, and seemed to sear and burn his throat and lungs at each gasping, laboured breath. He floundered around choking, coughing, spitting, tears streaming from his smarting eyes, his insides heaving and retching. And worse and worse grew his agony. His lungs felt as if they were bursting, the poisonous fumes were choking him, and his head felt like splitting and as if a red-hot band was pressing against his brow and temples. Almost suffocated, the last rest of his dwindling consciousness urged him towards the fresh air outside. He staggered in the direction of the door, but on his way he stumbled over some object on the floor, sprawled headlong, and his rifle was knocked out of his hand and clattered along the boards. Sobbing and gasping, he groped frantically around for his weapon, when his hand closed over some firm object. It was his big hunting knife, which was still lying on the floor after his last meal. Clutching it convulsively in his hand, he struggled to his feet, staggered to the door, lowered the bar, and reeled out into the night.

At once a dark shadow hurled itself at him, but the fresh air had already cleared Charley's mind sufficiently for him to yield to his instincts of self-preservation. He began to struggle fiercely, and slashed madly about him with his knife. But his assailant proved too powerful for him. A hand like a steel spring closed over his wrist and put the knife out of action, and gradually Charley felt himself forced backwards on to the ground. He collapsed at last, but though his breath had been almost knocked out of him in the fall, he continued to writhe and twist, snapping and biting at the body holding him down. But that body never yielded, and soon Charley was pinned down helplessly, his two arms being held rigid in the vice-like grip of a pair of strong, capable hands.

"Get busy, Angus," he heard his captor say. "Get that knife out of his hand and slip the handcuffs on him."

Angus, who had been hopping around during the fracas hoping to find an opening to join in, now quickly bent down and wrested the knife out of Charley's hand. The latter's wrists were next forced together, and soon a pair of handcuffs clicked shut over them.

"Better get some rope from the sleigh so we can hobble him," continued Weston. "He still feels full of life. And give Mason a shout to stop that scandalous waste of Government property out there."

Mason, in the true spirit of Casabianca, had continued his aimless bombardment, even though confused noises from the direction of the shack ought to have warned him that the climax had been reached. Not for him to disregard orders, he told himself, almost bursting with virtue. He had received no orders when to cease fire, so until such instructions were forthcoming the original order still held good with him.

But at Angus's hail he downed tools, and strode across to where Weston was still straddling his captive.

"Have you got him, sir?" he asked politely, conversationally and wholly unnecessarily.

"Got him is right," chuckled Weston. "I felt pretty confident that our little surprise packet would turn the trick. I think we have reason to congratulate ourselves, Mason."

"Can't say I feel particularly proud of my own share, sir," remarked Mason, a little pettishly. "I felt no end of a fool hanging out yonder like a super."

"Never mind," laughed Weston. "Next time you'll have all the fun. You filled your part of the contract admirably, so you have no reason to feel peeved. Here's Angus back. Now hobble this gentleman."

The order was speedily and efficiently carried out, and Weston got up.

"Well, Angus," he remarked, a touch of justifiable triumph in his voice, "what do you think of sulphur now? You have sneered at it pretty frequently in the past, but if I hadn't had those sticks on my sleigh where would we have been now?"

"Well, I guess him sulphur amazin' med'cine for smokin' out bohunk," admitted Angus handsomely. "But me still thinks it dam' foolish feedin' to dogs," he maintained stoutly.

"Oh, well," observed Weston philosophically, "as long as you can spot some advantage in it, I have to be satisfied, I suppose. But say, Angus, please climb up on Mason's shoulders and get that plug out of the stove-pipe. If we leave the door open for an hour or so after I think the air will be bearable in the shack once more. We might as well spend the night in there."

The plug was speedily removed, and after that Mason and Angus picked up Charley and carried him between them to their temporary camp, Weston bringing up the rear of the procession.

They dumped Charley unceremoniously on the spruce-mat alongside their fire, where he lay glaring at them, his eyes snapping with fury and hate; but without being in any way cowed by his manifestation of utter detestation,

Mason and Angus unconcernedly began piling logs on the fire.

"Angus, please get my emergency kit out of the grub-box," asked Weston, "and help me bandage up my right arm."

"You hit?" asked Angus with polite curiosity rather than concern.

"He scratched my right forearm with his knife," explained Weston. "Nothing to write home about. My caribou-coat broke the force of the stroke, though his intentions were undoubtedly good."

The gash was not very deep, but Weston had bled considerably, and, which he pointed out with quite some annoyance, a perfectly good tunic had been about completely spoilt. But Angus tried to soothe his ruffled feelings by drawing his attention to the fact that it was all done in a good cause, and that one could never expect to have any fun in this world without paying for it some way or another. And while Angus delivered himself of these valuable grains of philosophy, he dexterously and neatly dressed Weston's wound in a manner which bespoke extensive practice and earnest application.

"Let's have something to eat while we wait for that shack to become habitable," suggested Weston as soon as the operation had been finished. "I don't know about you chaps, but I feel as empty as anything. And our dogs haven't been fed yet. We have to feed this fellow's dogs too. What about you?" he asked the prisoner. "Are you hungry?"

But Charley refused to be dragged into any exchange of bright chat.

"Well, silence means consent, so I take it we are all hungry," observed Weston. "You have better do the honours, Angus, seeing I'm a casualty," he ended with a grin.

Angus responded nobly to the occasion, and soon he was bustling energetically around the fire, while Weston outlined their programme for the following day.

■

"We'll make an early start from here," he announced, "as we have to pick up that man Nathan Otter on our way back. He'll have to answer for his sins in——"

"Yes. Go ahead an' arrest that skunk," interrupted the captive rudely, speaking in English. Nathan's name had acted as a release-spring for his smouldering rage. "Him Nathan bad man. Him kill fellow here——"

"Look here, Charley," cut in Weston, "I must warn you that what you say can be used as evidence against——"

"Use an' be dam'!" grated Charley. "Me want to tell you all about him skunk Nathan. Las' time me up here, couple seasons ago, him murder white trapper. Me see it all. One day me out huntin' moose I see Nathan steal fur from white fellow's traps. I hide myself to see what happen. By an' by white trapper come along, and when Nathan see him, he up with rifle an' shoot him dead. Then he . . ."

From this point on Charley left his flight of fancy and stuck to facts as we already know them.

"So that was what happened to that trapper that time," muttered Weston when Charley had finished his story. "I remember that case. Sergeant Wilson was up here trying to solve the mystery, but could find out nothing about the missing man." He looked thoughtfully at Charley for some moments. "Have you been telling the truth?" he asked suddenly.

Charley looked him straight in the eyes without flinching.

"As true's me sit here," he stated firmly.

"And why didn't you report this at the time?"

"Me no dam' policeman. None o' my business," sneered Charley.

"So that was the reason Nathan helped you. Well, I'm going to investigate this matter thoroughly. You may have told the truth, and then again, you may not."

"Me tell the truth," persisted Charley. "An' I want to say other things. I never did them killin's you say I done. An' you know you can't prove nothin'."

"What killings?" asked Weston innocently.

"The killin's of Dave Brandon an' that red-coat."

"You never gave me a chance to say of what I accused you, so how do you know I suspect you of those murders?" asked Weston gravely.

Charley kept discreetly silent. He felt he had made a false move.

Weston waited for a while, but when he saw that Charley evidently intended to be silent, he continued:

"But now you have raised the question, we *do* suspect you strongly of having murdered both Brandon and Corporal Connor. And if I'm not much mistaken, we shall find proofs of our suspicions around here. Search him, Mason," he ordered. "We'll see what he has got on his person."

Charley tried to wriggle, but Mason tackled the job systematically and efficiently in spite of it. He soon emptied Charley's pockets of the ammunition through which he had hoped to gain his freedom, and finally he pulled out of an inner pocket in Charley's vest a bulky packet of bills, which he handed to Weston.

"Two thousand and fifteen dollars," grunted Weston, when he had counted the bills. "Where did you get all that money, Charley?"

"None o' your dam'd biss'ness!" snapped Charley, his eyes blazing.

"No need, really, for you to say anything," remarked Weston. "I can guess. Some of these are rather big new bills, so I have no doubt they can be traced as having formed part of Brandon's missing pay-roll. But that can wait."

He broke off and whispered a few words into Mason's ears, whereupon Mason disappeared. He returned in a few minutes carrying Charley's snow-shoes.

Weston took them and studied them for some minutes.

"Where did you get these snow-shoes, Charley?" he asked presently in the Cree tongue.

"They are mine. I didn't steal them, if that's what you mean," answered Charley in the same language.

"There is a rather funny knot in the babiche on one of these snow-shoes," continued Weston. "And do you know, Charley, the mark of a knot exactly like that was found in the snow-shoe tracks of the man who shot Brandon, and also in the tracks found at your camp at Lac la Ronge, where Corporal Connor was found murdered. What have you got to say to that?"

"That's a lie," said Charley. "You can't bluff me with a silly story like that. Go ahead and prove it. Those tracks you found are wiped out long before now," sneered Charley defiantly.

"That's where you are mistaken, Charley," remarked Weston gravely. "Those tracks still exist. When Corporal Connor first went out to investigate Brandon's murder, he took some very plain photographs of the tracks he found down there, and the police who went up to your camp at Lac la Ronge to look into Corporal Connor's death, took photographs of the tracks they found up there which had been left by the occupant of that camp, and they both show that one of the snow-shoes had a knot like this."

A spasm of fear shot across Charley's face.

"You are lying," he muttered thickly. "You are just telling me these lies to trick me into confessing to things I know nothing about."

"I'm not lying to you, Charley, and I'm not trying to trick you into confessing. More, I will advise you to say nothing further until you have had a talk with a lawyer when you get down south," said Weston, not unkindly. "Mason, take these snow-shoes, wrap them up carefully, and place them in our pack."

Charley lay back for a while, his head in a whirl. But gradually he was able to think clearly, and he began silently to curse himself for his stupidity. He had quite overlooked that tell-tale knot in the snow-shoe. Why had he not got rid of the accursed things? But who could

have thought that a little insignificant thing like that knot should prove to be of such vast importance? But he would take the police chief's advice, and not say another word. Perhaps after he had had a talk with a good lawyer they could hit upon some story between them that would explain away the snow-shoe tracks. He had heard tell that lawyers were shrewd men who could make things look quite differently to what they actually were. And he hoped for his own sake that the hearsay would prove to be a fact in this case. But he had to admit that for the present he was in a desperately tight corner.

While Mason was wrapping up Charley's snow-shoes Weston sat staring thoughtfully into the fire. Presently he addressed Angus and Mason.

"Charley's story about Nathan necessitates a slight change in our plans," he said. "I'll start out to-morrow morning ahead of you with our own dogs, and I'll go straight to Nathan's camp. You two will come along with the prisoner and his dogs and outfit. Make straight for Beaver Narrows, and don't go near Nathan's camp. Nathan may be out on his trap-line when I arrive, so I may have to wait for him. And I don't want any of his family to know that Charley is arrested before I have had a talk with Nathan. The best course for you will be to follow Mason's and my tracks till you get well past the camp."

Mason and Angus nodded their understanding, and soon Angus spread a choice meal under their covetous eyes.

Bright and early Weston left his companions the next morning. He was travelling very light. His sleigh contained only his bedding and some provisions, so he was able to travel fast over the firm snow.

He arrived at Nathan's camp shortly after noon and found Nathan in his cabin.

The latter had been in an agony of fear and apprehension since his visit to Charley's camp. He had sent his son out

on the trap-line, informing his wondering wife that he did not feel quite well.

His statement had some foundation in truth. He had spent an almost sleepless night, and was feeling wretched. He had turned Charley's scheme over and over in his mind in all its grim phases, and he had begun to doubt that he could summon up enough courage to go through with his part. The whole plan appeared to him so cold-blooded that the mere thought of it made him tremble with terror and fear.

He was seriously debating in his own mind whether the wisest course for him would not be to drop out of the affair altogether, stay passive and let matters take their course without his connivance.

He was still arguing backwards and forwards in his mind when the inspector unexpectedly arrived several days before he was due back, and the fact added materially to Nathan's mental agony. Now he was forced to decide on his course, and decide quickly.

As soon as Weston had gone through the usual formalities of etiquette he bade Mrs. Otter and her children leave the shack for a while as he wanted a few words with the head of the family. Fearfully and apprehensively Mrs. Otter and her two daughters donned their furs and crept out, feeling that some terrible calamity had overtaken them.

"Nathan," said Weston in Cree, as soon as they were alone, "I want you to tell me the whole truth about what happened up here two seasons ago, when you killed that white trapper."

For once the stoical calm of his race utterly forsook Nathan. He stared at Weston with terrified eyes, his face working with surprise and fear.

"I—I——" he spluttered desperately.

"Don't try to lie, Nathan," warned Weston gravely. "I know you did it. You are in great danger, and only if you tell the truth, the full truth, can you hope to be saved."

For a moment Nathan looked into Weston's grave eyes, thinking desperately. Was the policeman only trying to trick him into confessing, or did he really know? But he instantly dismissed his suspicion of trickery. He knew that the inspector had a general reputation for straight dealing, and he further knew that the police were just and fair, and that all were accorded a straight deal by them. And besides, he felt a certain sense of relief in the prospect of getting rid of the burden which had been pressing heavily on him for so long.

"Yes," he said. "I'll tell you the truth, chief." And he simply and truthfully told the whole story.

"And this is the truth, the whole of the truth, Nathan?" asked Weston when Nathan had ceased speaking.

"The whole truth. I swear it by God and his Saints above me!" affirmed Nathan solemnly, his right hand raised.

"And why did you not tell the story at the time?"

"Because I was afraid," explained Nathan simply.

"Did you ever rob that white man's traps?" continued Weston.

Nathan looked straight at Weston, reproach and indignation in his gaze.

"I never robbed any man's traps. I am no thief," he announced with quiet, convincing dignity.

"And Charley Crow knew about this? That was the reason you helped him?"

"How did you know?" asked Nathan dumbfounded, almost reeling under this second shock.

"We arrested Charley yesterday," explained Weston, "and he is now on his way to Beaver Narrows. Charley told me that he had seen you kill that man, but he told us that you killed him because the white man had discovered you rifling his traps."

"That is a lie!" cried Nathan in indignant fury. "Two seasons ago Charley came and told me he had seen

me do it, and he made me give him two hundred dollars' worth of furs to keep quiet about it. Then he came up here some time ago and forced me to help him. He said he would tell you the story the way he has if I refused to help him, but if I hid him he would say nothing, and I was afraid, and did it."

"Well, Nathan, I must take you with me," said Weston. "You have done wrong, and a man must take his punishment for the wrong he has done. But if you have really been telling me the truth, I think I can promise you that your punishment will not be hard. I shall now send your family in to you so you can take leave of them. We start in half an hour."

And Weston got up and walked out of the cabin. Outside he drew Mrs. Otter to one side, away from the frightened children.

"Your husband has done some wrongs," he explained, "and he must go away with me. But I think I can promise you that he will not be away very long. What do you want to do? Will you go back home to Beaver Narrows with us, or do you wish to stay here and continue the trapping?"

Mrs. Otter thought for some moments.

"I will stay here," she said bravely. "My son will help me. What has Nathan done? Is he in any danger?"

"He will tell you himself what he has done, and he is not in any desperate danger. Have you got enough provisions?"

"Yes. Quite plenty."

"Very well. Go in to your husband. We start in half an hour, and I promise you that I shall do all I can to help Nathan."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Otter gravely and simply, holding out her hand, then she beckoned her children and walked into the shack.

Two days later Weston and Nathan arrived at Beaver

Narrows. Constable Mason and Angus did not arrive till a day later with their prisoner.

Charley was in an ugly and vindictive mood. He taunted Nathan gloatingly with having got him into trouble, and he told him that he should take good care that Nathan got just as much as was given him, Charley.

Weston carried on searching and exhaustive investigations around Beaver Narrows, and all information tended to prove that Nathan had been telling the truth. The dead white trapper was described by all as a swaggering, overbearing bully, ugly-tempered and disagreeable. Nathan, on the other hand, was generally spoken well of. Of course he had many of the faults of his race, but he was not worse than the majority of his tribal brethren, rather better. And all could testify that Nathan as a common fur-thief was quite unthinkable, while everyone agreed that all evidence pointed strongly towards Charley for being responsible for the spoliation of traps two seasons ago.

And from all these bits of evidence, Weston was able to form a very accurate opinion of what had actually occurred.

When Weston and his party finally started south with the prisoners, the former's last request to his sister-in-law and his friends was to keep an eye on the Otter family, and see to it that they did not suffer any want during Nathan's absence. But he might have saved himself the trouble. Mrs. Gunn had, as soon as she had heard the story, begun to lay plans for the alleviation of the lot of the family which had been bereft of their bread-giver so suddenly.

And it may be stated here that Charley Crow's well-meant plans of revenge met with scant success.

Owing to Weston's efforts on his behalf, Nathan's case was settled before the local magistrate down in Portage Bend, a man who knew and understood the mentality of the natives. The charge of aiding a fugitive from justice was not preferred. Weston simply suppressed it under the circumstances. In the end Nathan was sentenced to six

months in jail for manslaughter, with the extenuating circumstance of provocation.

To his great disgust, Charley was not even called to give evidence against Nathan. But he soon forgot that slight over matters of major importance. He soon had plenty of troubles of his own. He found to his chagrin that his optimistic faith in the omnipotence of the legal profession had been grossly misplaced. True, his counsel made quite a credible attempt to disprove the evidence of the snowshoe tracks, but, though he tackled the job with great ingenuity and eloquence, his efforts proved a dismal failure. In the end Charley was found guilty, and one early morning a month or so later, he ended his chequered career on the scaffold in the courtyard of the Prince Albert gaol.

CHAPTER XV

EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM INSPECTOR WESTON TO HIS WIFE

" . . . We returned back from patrol last night after an excellent and very refreshing trip," read Betty Weston to her mother in far away California. "It was really a wonderful treat for me to be out in the woods once again, after having been confined to the office for so long. I feel quite the better and brighter man.

"We only went as far as Beaver Narrows. Kit, Allan, Bill Jennings, and Tootles were all in the pink, and are all sending their love. Bill still loves you. He has not quite forgiven me for 'snapping you up, right under his nose,' as he graphically and touchingly described it. We spent a jolly time up there. The weather mostly kept fine, though we had a few blizzards on the trip to keep things interesting.

"By the way, I had a slight accident on the trip. I was idiot enough to stumble and fall against a knife, which cut my right forearm. I'm afraid I shall have a nasty scar, as the frost got to the wound." Weston was a far-seeing general. He knew that scar would be discovered sooner or later, and he wanted to make quite sure of having a story cut and dried beforehand. He did not intend being taken by surprise, and be called upon to extemporize a tale which might turn out a howling failure. "All in all," continued his letter, "it was a nice quiet outing, quite a picnic, as it were. . . ."

"Isn't the dear boy clever?" remarked Betty Weston

with a smile as she got to this part of his letter. " And the funny part of it is, that I think he honestly expects us to believe it. I wonder if he has quite forgotten the power of the Press? " And she looked thoughtfully at the Portage Bend semi-weekly contribution to the World Press, which had arrived that morning, and which had done full justice and honour to Weston's triumphal return to Portage Bend with his two prisoners.

THE END

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